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THE NEW REPUBLIC

THE CASE AGAINST NEW IDEAS

AND WHY THEY WON'T RETURN THE DEMOCRATS TO POWER)

JONATHAN CHAIT

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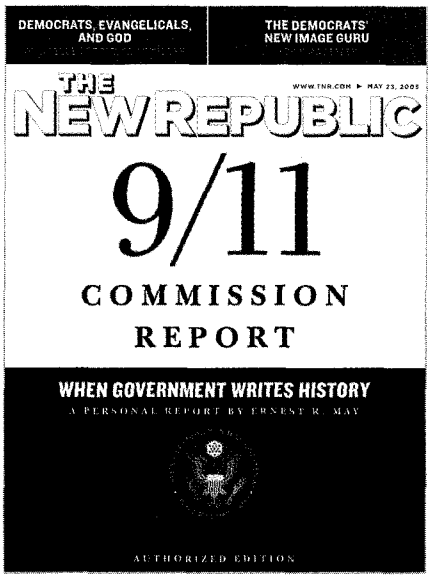
CORRESPONDENCE

FRAMED

NOAM SCHEIBER HAS WRITTEN A hatchet job about what I have been saying to political leaders; he has portrayed me as giving bad advice to the Democratic Party ("Wooden Frame," May 23). Most of my work is nonpartisan—not for any party, but for issue-oriented advocacy groups and progressive grassroots groups around the country. Yes, I have also been asked by Democratic Party leaders to speak to caucuses, and I have done so with pleasure. I will help them to deal with the right-wing threat to our country in any way I can. My talks have met with a generally positive response.

Where do Scheiber and I disagree? When Democratic leaders ask my advice, I stress unity. I suggest that unity can be achieved—see chapter eight of my book *Don't Think of An Elephant*—by moving upward (toward shared values and policy directions), not rightward (toward right-wing values and policies). I argue that there is no "center," but rather complex combinations of strict and nurturant worldviews, complexities that must be understood. I also advise Democrats to argue positions on the merits, starting with values, since values plus facts jointly constitute the merits of an issue. I tell Democrats not to depend on magic words: The real work in reclaiming political discourse is building up a system of ideas and arguments that expresses Democratic values effectively and honestly.

Scheiber and I disagree, and that's fine. Unfortunately, he has distorted my views. Scheiber apparently believes that Democrats not recommending a rightward move must be recommending a move to the left and must be attacked. Accordingly, Scheiber leaves out my recommendation to stand behind shared values. I advise Democrats to argue positions on the basis of values and facts—that is, on the merits. He falsely claims that I advise them otherwise. Furthermore, in his snide description of my class, Scheiber cited a handful of comments mostly not by Berkeley students, but by visitors whose remarks were not at all representative of the deep and interesting comments by the real students. And, depending only on a couple of congressional aides' distant—



and incorrect—memories, Scheiber misrepresents my suggestions at caucuses and retreats. I have discussed Frank Luntz's legitimate research, as well as his distortions and lies, which I argue against emulating.

Scheiber's misrepresentations hide the real issue: I advise Democrats to move upward and to speak with one voice about shared values and policy directions, without moving to the right. I'm new to this game, but I must be doing something right: Pitchers don't aim at your head unless you're hitting a few out of the park.

GEORGE LAKOFF
Professor of Linguistics
University of California
Berkeley, California

NOAM SCHEIBER RESPONDS:
My piece describes Professor Lakoff as an "affable and generous man"; it praises his "unusually sophisticated understanding of the American right"; it notes that the insights in his book are "profound" and that they "help explain last fall's presidential election." Not exactly hatchet-job material. Our biggest source of disagreement seems to be Lakoff's belief that the Democratic Party would be well-served by stressing the values all Democrats share. This advice is problematic in two respects. First, even at the most abstract level, Democrats' values aren't nearly as homogenous as Lakoff implies—certainly not outside the realm of economics. The party, as few people need reminding, is home to hawks and doves, abortion opponents and abortion supporters, to name just a few areas of contention.

Second, even if we drop the demand for perfect unanimity, it's ludicrous to suggest that the "values and policy directions" that could garner majority support among Democrats are the same ones that could return them to power. The recent history of presidential campaigns suggests the opposite. Bill Clinton could not have won without defusing widespread suspicions of Democrats as overly permissive of crime and other deviant behavior. George W. Bush could not have won without defusing suspicions of Republicans as heartless and intolerant. Both of these required substantive, as well as rhetorical, concessions, which most in their respective parties would have preferred to avoid. The twin goals of "unity" and "winning" aren't always compatible. Lakoff can have unity. I'll take winning.

As for Lakoff's class, I included contributions from nine different students in my piece. If most of these people turned out to be mere interlopers, I'm not sure where the real students were hiding. Finally, my description of the advice Lakoff dispenses to Democratic politicians is, in most cases, perfectly consistent with the advice he lays out in his books. Where it diverges, I asked him about it explicitly and included his response.

JUDGE DREAD

THE EDITORS' JUSTIFICATION OF Democratic filibusters is full of

continued on page 37

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- Second, arguments fall into a handful of distinctive categories—and the same issues are at stake each time one of these distinctive patterns occurs.
- Third, there are six kinds of evidence that can be advanced to prove an argument that something is true—and the same tests for truth can be applied to these types of evidence every time.
- Fourth, argumentation is not mere quarreling: it is the study of human communication that seeks to persuade through reasoned judgment, and it is a deeply social and cooperative practice. (Though there are places where winning an argument rather than finding the truth is prized, this is not why most of us exchange arguments.)

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Dr. Zarefsky is the Owen L. Coon Professor of Argumentation and Debate and Professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University, where he has taught for over 30 years. The Student Government of Northwestern has elected Professor Zarefsky to the Honor Roll for Teaching *12 times*. A nationally recognized authority on rhetoric and argumentation, he has won several national awards for his own successes in debate and argumentation, and has coached National Championship debaters at Northwestern University. He is also a distinguished author on communications. The National Communication Association has twice given its Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Rhetoric and Public Address to Dr. Zarefsky.

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Hollow Point

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

THE LAST FEW WEEKS HAVE PRODUCED two main avenues for criticizing the war. The first is the series of Bush administration missteps driving the deteriorating situation in Iraq. The second is the Bush administration's apparent determination to "fix" intelligence around its decision to go to war, as described in the so-called Downing Street Memo.

Democrats and independent-minded Republicans have mostly picked up the first criticism. As Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel told *U.S. News & World Report* last week, "The White House is completely disconnected from reality. It's like they're just making it up as they go along. The reality is that we're losing in Iraq." And, politically, it's pretty clear why critics would prefer this line of attack. The easiest way to reconcile your support for the war with the strategic and political disaster it has become is to blame flawed execution.

But, intellectually, basing your criticism of the war entirely on the administration's mismanagement is dubious if you supported it in the first place. The more honest—and ultimately more damning—criticism would seize on the apparent doctoring of intelligence.

The best example of how *not* to criticize the administration is a *New York Times* op-ed John Kerry published the day of President Bush's speech this week. "Our mission in Iraq is harder," Kerry wrote, "because the administration ignored the advice of others, went in largely alone, underestimated the likelihood and power of the insurgency, sent in too few troops to secure the country, destroyed the Iraqi army through de-Baathification, failed to secure ammunition dumps, refused to recognize the urgency of training Iraqi security forces and did no postwar planning."

The problem with Kerry's argument is that there's a difference between expecting the administration to fight a war competently and expecting it to fight an entirely different kind of war than the one you signed onto. Kerry is essentially accusing the administration of botching democratization. And, to be fair, the administration did begin by touting democratization as its goal when it didn't find WMD. Prior to the war, however, there was simply no indication that the administration intended to pursue democratization seriously.

Recall, after all, that Dick Cheney spent the summer of 2002 asserting that American troops would be greeted by Iraqis as "liberators," the suggestion being that the postwar phase would be relatively smooth, certainly nothing that would require a costly, long-term commitment. Throughout August and September, defense correspondents like Tom Ricks of *The Washington Post* reported on Pentagon war-planning, which emphasized the civilian leadership's preference for a small contingent of relatively light, mobile forces—closer to 100,000 in number than the 500,000 troops mobilized for the first Gulf war. Then, three weeks before Congress's vote to authorize force, administration officials trekked to the Hill to suggest that the occupation would be relatively short and painless. "[W]e are certainly looking at the duration of any such mission with a goal of turning it over to international elements or back to the people as quickly as possible," said Colin Powell. "Nobody wants to go and stay for any extended length of time if it is avoidable." Donald Rumsfeld predicted the administration would benefit from the cooperation of ordinary Iraqis. "[M]aybe I'm old-fashioned, but I think the Iraqi people ought to have a voice in it," he said when asked about postwar planning.

And all of this took place against the backdrop of Afghanistan, where the administration professed lofty ambitions about liberty and justice only to abandon the country to a rump force of international peacekeepers and several thousand American troops. "Afghanistan is a nation in name only," wrote the *Post*'s Susan Glasser and Peter Baker in June of 2002. "It is fragmented into city-states dominated by warlords. … [A]s long as [Afghan President Hamid] Karzai exercises no control over the provinces, little can be done to rebuild his shattered country in a meaningful way."

Responsible Democrats and Republicans might have hoped the administration would fight the kind of war likely to produce a stable and democratic Iraq. Delaware Senator Joe Biden went so far as to personally ask Bush to tell the American people what kind of resources that mission would entail. But, in reality, a war with these priorities simply wasn't the war the administration was proposing (though it would have been more than happy to see democracy as a serendipitous by-product). Which means that the actual calculation members of Congress faced at the time of the authorization vote wasn't whether they believed the administration intended to bring democracy to Iraq. It was whether or not they believed the threat posed by Saddam outweighed the very real risk that his ouster would be followed by chaos. If they did, they had an obligation to support the war. If they didn't, they had an obligation to oppose it.

But, thanks to the administration's misuse of intelligence, this calculation was utterly meaningless. In a series of speeches in the fall of 2002, Bush asserted that the Iraqis had attempted to purchase aluminum tubes used to make a uranium-enrichment device and that Iraq had unmanned aerial vehicles that might be capable of targeting the United States. A White House report predicted that Saddam could build a nuclear bomb within months if he got his hands on fissile material. All of these claims proved to be false. Now, the Downing Street Memo tells us the administration knew its intelligence was flawed and didn't particularly care.

Having to vote on a war likely to produce one type of threat (chaos in Iraq) in order to eliminate a potentially larger threat (a nuclear Iraq) is an unsavory decision. But it's the kind of decision we elect Congress to make. That's why voters didn't warm to Kerry's criticism of the war's execution during last fall's campaign—it was hard to believe Iraq had turned out so much differently than he had expected. And that's why they're not likely to warm to it today.

But, in reality, the administration wasn't asking Congress to make a tough call in favor of war. It was asking Congress to make a decision that, had it been apprised of the actual intelligence on Iraq, would have been a no-brainer—against authorization. That's the real scandal here. And, if people like Kerry and Hagel want to assign blame, then intelligence-fixing would be the place to start.

NOAM SCHEIBER

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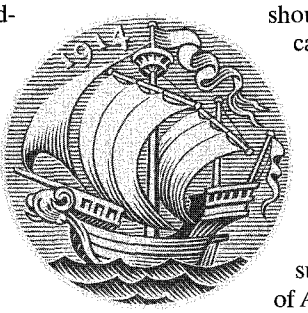
Breyer Restraint

THE SUPREME COURT term that ended this week managed to infuriate both liberals and conservatives. In particular, the Court's decisions upholding some displays of the Ten Commandments but not others and allowing New London, Connecticut, to seize private homes in an effort to promote economic development were attacked by critics on both sides of the political spectrum for exalting pragmatism over constitutional principle. But, in fact, both sets of decisions were defensible in constitutional as well as practical terms. They represented an admirable recognition that the Court governs best when it governs least.

It's easy to sympathize with those who instinctively question the harsh result in the property rights case, *Kelo v. New London*. A 5–4 majority allowed the New London City Council to use eminent domain—a government's right to seize property in its jurisdiction so long as it provides just compensation—to take nine homes from their owners in order to develop office buildings to complement a nearby pharmaceutical research facility that the city believes will create jobs. Many citizens, understandably, view this outcome as unfair. Nevertheless, defenders of judicial restraint, particularly liberals, should applaud the Court's refusal to second-guess the economic judgments of city and state legislatures. Had the Court come out the other way, as libertarian supporters of the so-called Constitution in Exile urged it to do, the decision would have unleashed a torrent of judicial activism that might have called into question everything from local zoning ordinances to environmental laws.

The appropriate response to the unfairness inherent in individual cases involving eminent domain is political, not judicial. This week, Senator John Cornyn of Texas introduced the Protection of Homes, Small Businesses, and Private Property Act of 2005, which would prohibit any government—state, local, or federal—that accepts federal funds for a development project from using eminent domain to promote economic growth. A bill like this might help to discourage eminent domain abuse—that is, condemnation of private homes for private profit—without asking judges to second-guess the economic decisions of legislators, a task for which they are notoriously ill-equipped.

The Ten Commandments decisions were similarly farsighted. By a 5–4 vote, the Court struck down displays of the Ten Commandments in two Kentucky courthouses, holding that the exhibits lacked a legitimate secular purpose since they had been installed to acknowledge the Bible as Kentucky's "precedent legal code." By contrast, a different 5–4 majority upheld Texas's tacky display of a huge Ten Commandments tablet outside the state capitol, since it had been sponsored by Cecil B. DeMille to promote his movie *The Ten Commandments*. The swing justice who joined both majorities was Stephen Breyer, who noted convincingly in his concurring opinion in the Texas case that religious displays can convey different messages in different contexts. Breyer also recognized that striking down all public displays of the Ten Commandments, as some extreme secularists demanded, might "create the very kind of religiously based divisiveness" that the Constitution seeks to avoid.



The Court's moderate performance is all the more striking when contrasted with the position of the most radical dissenting justice, Clarence Thomas. In the eminent domain and Ten Commandments cases, Thomas offered a highly questionable interpretation of the Constitution and urged the Court to overturn decades of its own precedents. If Thomas's view had prevailed, the states would no longer be required to respect constitutional prohibitions on the establishment of religion. And limits on judicial power over economic regulations that have prevailed since the New Deal would be dramatically altered.

In the event that Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist resigns, resisting a justice in Thomas's image should be the central focus of Senate Democrats. A Gallup poll released this week suggests that a narrow majority of Americans believe that President Bush should choose a consensus candidate for the Court if Democrats object to his first choice. Less than half, by contrast, believe that Bush should stand by his first choice if the nominee proves to be controversial. This suggests that the majority of Americans are relatively happy with the broad direction of the Supreme Court, even when they question the results in individual cases. The wise decisions this week were a reminder of why the pragmatic Court has earned the public's confidence by generally deferring to the political branches. Now it's time for a more ideological Congress to rise to the occasion. ■

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NOTEBOOK

STRANGE WEEK FOR HILLARY . . . REPUBLICANS THREATEN MLB

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

POOR DICK CHENEY. EVERY TIME the vice president wishes to make a simple, uncontroversial assessment of the war effort, lesser beings maliciously misinterpret his remarks. Luckily, Cheney's linguistic precision outclasses that of his enemies. Take last week, for example, when he told Larry King that the Iraqi insurgency—which, over the last few months, has murdered more than 1,200 Iraqis with suicide bombs alone—had entered its "last throes." Unfortunately for Cheney, General John Abizaid, commander of American troops in the Middle East, told a Senate panel last week that, by at least one measure—the influx of foreign fighters entering Iraq—the insurgents are stronger now than six months ago. The slow-witted might be tempted to think Abizaid's comment contradicts Cheney. But no: As Cheney explained to CNN's Wolf Blitzer, "If you look at what the dictionary says about throes, it can still be a violent period—the throes of a revolution."

Clearly, then, we see what Cheney meant. The insurgency, as any fair observer would admit, entered its last throes sometime about six months ago. After all, that's when the Iraqi elections took place, which the administration contended all along would deal a serious setback to the insurgency. Who could have known that setback would be so severe as to cause the insurgency to enter its "last throes"? Well, Dick Cheney—who also understands that a throe knows no temporal bounds. Add to the list of practitioners of such sublime, exalted levels of knowledge Cheney's old mentor, Donald Rumsfeld, who added on "Fox News Sunday" that the insurgency might continue through 2017. See? It's a long throe. One might even be tempted to call it a Hail Mary.

VICTIM AND PATRIOT

HILLARY CLINTON HAS HAD A CURIous week. There was the release of a

Dick Cheney

"biography" that ambitiously sets out to unmask the senator as a heartless, Machiavellian, asexual, Vince Foster–shagging lesbian. There's been the spectacle of the right wing scolding the book's author, Ed Klein, for having loused up an eagerly awaited hatchet job. (Bill O'Reilly: "I think [the book] is going to make her a victim, whereas [*sic*], you know, a lot of people are going to go, 'That's too much. This is too much.' " Peggy Noonan: "In terms of political impact, it is not a takedown but a buildup." Dick Morris: "The fact is that these personal attacks just empower the woman and give her examples of over-the-top criticism.") And then, dwarfed by the commotion, there has actually been something that mattered: another attempt by Republicans to pass a constitutional amendment against flag-desecration, a fight in which Clinton had to pick a side. Did the senator pass this test of patriotism?

As it turns out, yes. "I don't believe a constitutional amendment is the answer," Clinton announced. "Those few who would destroy a flag are not worthy of the response of amending our founding document." Some editorial writers might appreciate this, but, for the most part, Hillary Clinton has little politically to gain from it. Her supporters would forgive her for backing the amendment; her opponents would be denied a political weapon against her. In other words, the senator's behavior seems to be based on something suspiciously resembling, well, principle.

AS IF THE STEROID HEARINGS WEREN'T A STRETCH

HAUNTED BY THE SPECTER OF LIBERal financier George Soros in a Major League luxury box, two Republican congressmen this week diverted their attention from minor distractions, such as the recent spate of violence in Iraq, to focus on more serious matters. Upon hearing that Soros—who donated heavily to efforts to defeat George W. Bush in last year's presidential campaign—belonged to a group that put forth one of eight bids to buy the Washington Nationals, the Republican representatives hinted at revoking Major League Baseball's 83-year-old antitrust exemption. "It's not necessarily smart business sense to have anybody who is so polarizing in the political world," one of the two, Representative John Sweeney of New York, said. He added ominously, "That goes for anybody, but especially as it relates to Major League Baseball, because it's one of the few businesses that get incredibly special treatment from Congress and the federal government."

"Obsessive" might be a more accurate description than "special." Representative George Miller, a California Democrat, wondered: "So Congress is going to get involved in every baseball ownership decision? Are they next going to worry about a manager they don't like?" That's right, Buddy Bell, watch your back.

DAVID COWLES

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AUDIT(ORY) IMPAIRMENT

NOW THAT HALLIBURTON HAS, AS the Associated Press recently reported, taken on the responsibility of building a new 220-bed prison at Guantánamo Bay, it seems a shame to distract them from the task at a hand. But it appears congressional Democrats are insensitive to the energy conglomerate's need for creative focus in Cuba and insist on drawing attention to Halliburton's activities in Iraq.

On Monday, Senate and House Democrats released a report revealing that internal Pentagon audits have questioned a staggering $1.4 billion of Halliburton's expenses in Iraq. Among the suspicious charges were $45 cases of soda and $100-per-bag laundry fees. The company also billed the government for several months of preparing some 10,000 meals per day that American troops never ate. Other records indicated the company simply doubled up legitimate charges for food, oil, and services.

Boggled by the tally, Representative Henry Waxman complained that "taxpayers are getting bilked," but Halliburton spokeswoman Cathy Mann dismissed Democratic outrage as "political rhetoric." "Audits are part of the normal contracting process," Mann told *The Boston Globe*, "and it is important to note that the auditors' role in the process is advisory only." Yes, Pentagon, don't listen to those auditors. Instead, let us tell you about some very affordable magazine subscriptions to THE NEW REPUBLIC.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

"WRONG DOSE" (JULY 4), ABOUT the Bush administration's flawed attempt to build a system to deliver HIV-fighting medicines to the developing world, should have mentioned that, in addition to teams led by IBM and BearingPoint, a consortia between John Snow Inc. and Management Sciences for Health is still in the running for the government contract to create the system. We regret the omission. ■

TNR.commentary

&c.

LOSS OF USE: John Bolton's confirmation process is like a game of professional tennis: You can get whiplash just trying to follow it. After months of debate, failure on a first confirmation attempt before the full Senate, more debate, and failure again, the saga finally appeared to be over when Bill Frist signaled defeat this week. But, just as quickly, the fight was on again when President Bush refused to retreat. It now seems possible that, if his latest push fails, the White House will send Bolton to Turtle Bay through a recess appointment. That would allow Bush to bypass the Senate and hand Bolton the U.N. portfolio until the next congressional session.

For appearances—which are important in these situations so as not to incur GOP wrath by gloating—the Democrats would be smart to complain about any eventuality that makes Bolton our emissary to the world; and they're certainly right that it would be bad for diplomacy. But Democrats should accept a recess appointment happily. It ends (for now) the obstructionist charge that Republicans never seem to tire of leveling at Democrats, and it allows Dems to avoid casting a "no" vote they would probably have lost anyway. At the same time, it paints the majority GOP as unable to advance the president's agenda, which is pretty embarrassing, and it casts Bush as impatient and unwilling to submit to the constitutional process.

—Adam B. Kushner

JUST DESSERTS: What's worse than making a declaration of genocide and then doing effectively nothing to stop it? Making a declaration of genocide, doing effectively nothing to stop it, and then moving toward normalized relations with the perpetrators. The Bush administration dealt a new blow to the moral force of international law last week when it hosted a state visit by Sudanese Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail. The minister was granted high-level meetings with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who promised to review existing sanctions, and her deputy, Robert Zoellick, who preliminarily accepted an invitation to Sudan's presidential inaugural next month.

The Bush administration obviously wants to reward the Sudanese government for its cooperation in ending the decades-long civil war with Christian rebels in the south. The administration, under pressure from U.S. evangelicals, lobbied hard for a north-south accord and considers the peace agreement one of its signature achievements in Africa. Furthermore, there is a debt owed for terrorism-related intelligence that the Sudanese government has relayed. Sudan has been helpful in sharing intelligence data and providing access to terrorist suspects since September 11. The Central Intelligence Agency flew Sudanese national security chief Salah Abdallah Gosh to Washington as recently as April.

Still, it's hard to fathom how the administration can rationalize a gift basket of political and economic carrots for a country it has accused of orchestrating an ongoing genocide, resulting in between 180,000 and 300,000 deaths and displacing 2.4 million people thus far.

Certainly, Sudan's respect for human rights doesn't seem to have improved since the United States imposed a trade embargo and froze the government's assets in 1997, citing, in part, an "abysmal" human rights record. And, based on Zoellick's testimony to Congress last week, it would seem that Sudan still deserves its spot on the State Department's "state sponsors of terrorism" list. In explaining why it wasn't a good idea to send Western troops into Darfur, Zoellick said: "I honestly don't know what this could trigger with some of the dangerous people you have there. I mean, I'm thinking here of the Somalians. As I think we all agree, you've got some bloodthirsty, cold-hearted killers. . . . If we can make the African Union forces work, it's the best of all, because then they can't say, 'Oh, it's the U.S. or it's the British or colonial powers that are telling Sudan what to do. And, by the way, let's bring in new terrorist killers to go after them.' "

Of course, this sort of reasoning casts doubt on the wisdom of the decision to go into Iraq, which is inhabited, as Bush told us in his most recent radio address, by "ruthless killers with no regard for human life." But that's a different blog post.

For Sudan, it would seem that sticks are still the most appropriate foreign policy response. At least that's the thinking at the state level. Illinois has become the first state to suspend investment in companies that do business with Sudan, and other states are heading in that direction. In Illinois alone, the new law means divesting about $1 billion. Of course, that will be pennies to Sudan if the federal government moves the other way on sanctions. And it will be one less lever we have to pull to ensure the violence ends.

—Marisa Katz

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR ADAM B. KUSHNER AND ASSISTANT EDITOR MARISA KATZ ARE GUEST-BLOGGING &C. TO READ MORE OF THEIR POSTS AND OTHER TNR ONLINE CONTENT, GO TO WWW.TNR.COM.

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Damascus Dispatch

Chaos Theory

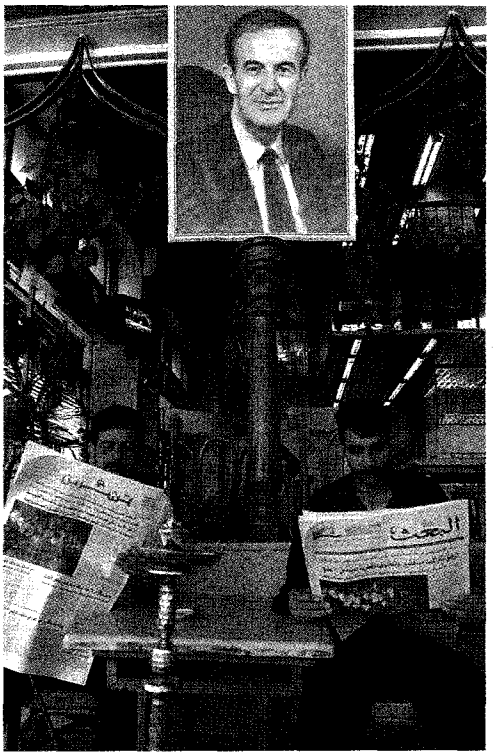
BY ANNIA CIEZADLO

IF EVER A country seemed ripe for regime change, Syria is it. It's run by a cabal of insiders, many from the same minority religious sect. In a region famed for joblessness, it has one of the highest rates of newly unemployed. Faced with relentless U.S. pressure—and with Iraq and Lebanon both undergoing seismic changes next door—Syrian President Bashar Al Assad should be running scared. "[F]ear of American power, and the example of American forces flushing Saddam Hussein out of his spider hole, now drive Syrian policy," exulted Fouad Ajami in *The Wall Street Journal* in May, adding that Syria's rulers hang on George W. Bush's every word, "wondering if Iraq was a crystal ball in which they could glimpse their future."

But, here in Damascus, it's Assad's opponents who are frightened. They fear going to jail, as many did last month in "Black May," when the government rounded up dozens of dissidents. They worry about being assassinated, like their friend and supporter, Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir. They're afraid of disappearing and turning up dead, like Sheik Mohammed Mashouq Al Khaznawi, a moderate Kurdish cleric who dared to call for political change.

Most of all, though, they are afraid of regime change itself—and of ending up like Iraq. In Syria, it's Assad's opponents, more than Assad himself, who fear Ajami's crystal ball. "We don't need war, really," says Kamal Al Labwani, a doctor who was imprisoned in Assad's 2001 crackdown on pro-democracy gatherings. "Not because we like this regime. We hate this regime. But only because we're very weak, really. We are afraid of civil war like Iraq."

Instead of inspiring Syrians, the example of Iraq has made even those who openly oppose the government deeply fearful of regime change. That fear has divided a weak opposition and strengthened Assad's already heavy hand. Among Syria's dissidents, the war next door has created a quandary: Syria's current government is intolerable. But sharing Iraq's fate—the only alternative most of them can envision right now—would be worse. "This is the dilemma," says Omar Amiralay, a prominent Syrian filmmaker and opposition leader. "Between wanting the regime to end, and, on the other side, fear of repeating the catastrophe in Iraq." For American policy-makers, Syria is a foreign policy koan: how to change this regime without regime change?



Two men in a Syrian coffee shop read about the Baath Party congress beneath the ever-watchful eyes of former President Hafez Al Assad.

IN THE LATE '70s and early '80s, the Muslim Brotherhood fought a bloody guerrilla war against the Baath, Syria's ruling party since 1963. Then-President Hafez Al Assad, Bashar's father, put down the uprising with uncommon savagery, razing the town of Hama, killing between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants and jailing scores of opponents. Today, the Baath prides itself on bringing order and stability to the country. Visible symbols of control are everywhere, even on the mountains that ring Damascus, one of which sports a gigantic digital clock—like a Baathist HOLLYWOOD sign—that tells the time down to the second.

But that clock is ticking for Assad, and he knows it. Few Syrians make more than $150 per month, and they are well-aware of how Assad's circle of cronies is plundering the country's wealth. With a sluggish official growth rate of less than 3 percent and a record number of young Syrians graduating into a nonexistent job market, most analysts believe the country is headed for a social explosion in the next several years. "It's not important whether you are a true reformer or not. It's reform or die," says Marwan Kabalan, a political science professor who consults for the government. "Bashar's very existence is tied to reform."

Today, the secular Syrian opposition is split into two camps: those who hope that the government will see the looming disaster and reform of its own accord, and those who aren't quite sure what to hope for. Louay Hussein, a publisher who defied a government ban forbidding him to write, is in the first camp. "The best possible thing that could happen is that part of the power—the system, the regime—stages a white revolution," Hussein said in May, before the Baath Party's congress in early June. "There is no real op-

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AP PHOTO/BASSEM TELLAWI

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position, no real alternative to take over the country. In this situation, there could be another civil war."

Hussein and others hoped that the congress, which ended on June 9, would usher in enough small changes to strengthen Syrian civil society—a sort of Syrian glasnost. Instead, Assad used the congress to consolidate his power, replacing a prominent member of his father's old guard with his own appointee and delivering a somnolent paean to the Arab nation's "steadfastness" against external threats—traditionally a code word for Israel, but one that has now expanded to include the U.S. project in Iraq.

FOR THE UNITED STATES, Syria is a logical next target for regime change. There's a popular joke in Damascus about this: American troops invade Syria. U.S. tanks, rolling triumphantly into the capital, get as far as Umayyad Square, a traffic roundabout that has been under construction for nearly two years. The American soldiers stop, climb out of their tanks, and look around at the dust, the destruction, the piles of torn concrete and rebar. "Turn around, let's go home," they shout. "We already came through here!"

The problem for American policymakers, post-Iraq, is to convince the Syrian people that the United States won't worsen the destruction already surrounding them. "If Americans want to present themselves to the Syrian people in a different light, they have to regain their virginity," says Amiralay. "The Americans have to take an interest in defending the Syrian people, and that's something that's been missing from the American engagement with Syria until now."

How could the United States pressure Assad without alienating average Syrians? One option is to create a wedge between Syria's Arabs and its Kurdish population of nearly two million, of whom over one-tenth live stateless in their own country, stripped of their citizenship by the Syrian government in 1962. Unlike Syria's Arab majority, the Kurds are actually inspired by the example of what has happened in Iraq. But Syria's dissidents fear that using the Kurds against the regime would trigger ethnic war, Iraq-style. "Signs of internal restlessness are increasing, and you see it very clearly in the north, in the Kurdish areas," says Yassin Al Haj Saleh, an ex-communist who spent 16 years in jail. "If we have a social explosion, God forbid, this social explosion might take on a sectarian character."

Targeted sanctions against individual members of Assad's inner circle might be another option, one that the U.S. Congress has begun contemplating. But would it be enough? Some are skeptical. "It would hurt them a little bit, on a personal level, if their houses in Virginia Beach were taken away and their kids couldn't go to American universities," says Joshua Landis, a history professor at the University of Oklahoma who is currently living in Damascus. "But the regime would tough it out. They have toughed out much worse than that. These guys don't have to go to America—they can go to Paris."

Haj Saleh and others point to a few simple things the U.S. government could do to build support inside Syria. First of all, American politicians need to stop calling "Syria" the enemy and start saying "the Syrian government." The United States could also take steps to resolve the deadlock between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights, which Assad, like his father before him, is using as an excuse to maintain martial law. It should also get the Europeans on board; about half of Syria's trade is with EU countries.

Most importantly, they suggest supporting Syrian civil society. "The U.S. and the Europeans should do whatever they can to support Syria's civil society—it's small, but it exists," says Maan Abdul Salam, an opposition activist who heads a publishing house in Damascus and also runs a website dedicated to women's issues. "If you are making pressure on the top, you need a foundation at the bottom so everything doesn't collapse. It will not be like the Iraq situation if they build something." For years, U.S. foreign policy toward Arab countries, whether friend or foe, has focused on despots. But the message from Syrian reformers is that, instead of worrying so much about our enemies, perhaps we should pay a little more attention to our friends. ■

Anglicans and Israel.
Bad English

BY MARTIN PERETZ

ABOUT 40 YEARS ago, when I was a young graduate student at Harvard, I drove the aging and very distinguished suffragan bishop of Massachusetts, W. Appleton Lawrence, from Cambridge to some "peace meeting" in the western part of the state. All of our meetings were peace meetings, not least the ones in camouflaged support of some aspect of Soviet foreign policy. Those were also the days when people on the left would do somersaults to persuade clergy—any ecclesiastic, really, to say nothing of someone high in the Episcopal hierarchy—to bring the imprimatur of God to the cause, rather like the politicized God of the American right today. But we never hoped that these prelates would levitate the crowd. About religion and politics, we were cynical, or, let us say, instrumental. Many of us thought of these divines as useful idiots, in Lenin's derisive coinage, mustered to assure the assembled that our aims were spiritually lofty and socially respectable. Somewhere around Amherst, I asked Lawrence what Anglicans believed. His face took on a deep, pensive look. "We believe," he intoned, "in civil rights for Negroes, the admission of Red China to the United Nations, and friendship with Castro Cuba." I do not at all want to belittle the bishop. I

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liked him. He was not pompous. And probably he thought that this clever Jewish boy from New York would not really be asking him a theological question, which is exactly what I was doing.

Still, I was immediately suffused with a sense of the impending decline of the Anglican Church, at least here in the United States. There immediately came to mind Theodore Roosevelt's devastating quip that the Episcopal Church was the Republican Party assembled for prayer. But I knew that it was no longer true, neither as fact nor even as metaphor. It's not that there aren't still Republicans who remain Episcopalians—and they may still outnumber Democrats who are Episcopalians. But Episcopalianism seems to have become intensely preoccupied with a misty meta-politics, instrumental about itself in its own way, utopian in pretense, and reckless in result. For all their purified language, the House of Bishops and the consultative councils of the Anglican Communion are settings either for ideological dogmatism, nearly always with unanimous decisions, or for lifestyle fratricide, as in the debates about gay clergy and gay marriage. In any case, the number of Episcopalians is in steep descent. The influence of the American church—such as it is—seems to be limited to the sway it exercises over the bureaucracies of the 35 other declining Protestant denominations assembled in that portentous rump called the National Council of Churches, always "joining hands and voices" for something goofy or worse.

The Episcopal Church in the United States has long been threatening to disinvest from U.S. companies that "support the occupation of Palestinian lands"—such as Caterpillar, whose tractors are used by settlers in the West Bank. (To be sure, it would disinvest from companies that promote violence against innocent Israelis. But which U.S. corporation makes suicide bombs?) The Episcopalians are not the first of the Protestant churches to go down the disinvestment route against Israel. The Presbyterians have that distinction. But, just last week, in England, the Anglican Consultative Council, including the present Archbishop of Canterbury, voted unanimously to do the same. (The previous archbishop criticized the move.) The Anglicans have an analysis backing up their position: "It is the Israeli occupation in its many facets that foments the violence and fuels the conflict." This ignores so many facts that it boggles the mind. Neither the Arabs of Palestine nor the established Arab states were willing to accept an Israel within very crimped borders; the occupation began in 1967 after the Arabs provoked—but lost—a war to eradicate precisely such a precarious Israel; and the Palestinians rejected out of hand the near-total withdrawals that Israel offered at Camp David in 2000 and Taba in 2001. These peace-mongering Anglican bishops are playing the role of "useful idiots," this time for Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the other irredentist and murderous factions of the Palestinian polity that will be remembered for adventures like sending, last week, a troubled young woman to blow herself up at a hospital in Beersheba where she had been treated conscientiously and competently for her maladies.

The Anglican luminaries are either ignorant or mendacious. A church spokesman, James Rosenthal, stated that the resolution expressed the Anglican concern for the situation of Palestinian Christians living in the territories. Now, it is true that Christians are in deep despair in emerging Palestine—but not because they are endangered by Israel. They are tormented and threatened by Muslim extremists inside and outside the Palestinian Authority. Ever since the handshake on the White House lawn, Christians have been deserting the territories out of fear that the Israelis will abandon them to the twin mercies of virulent Arab nationalism and Islamic fanaticism. Until the Oslo agreement, Christians were perhaps 60 percent of the population of Bethlehem. Now they are down to 30 to 35 percent. Bethlehem is not the only town that Christians are forsaking. Some of them have gone to Detroit; others to Australia. The responsibility for the predicament of Palestinian Christians lies squarely with those Palestinian Muslims whom the Anglicans and Presbyterians and everybody else with supposed good in their hearts have long tried to appease. (In carving up the tiny old city of Jerusalem at Camp David, negotiators proposed placing portions of Jerusalem's Christian neighborhoods under Palestinian sovereignty, and sheer panic ensued among the city's resident Christians, whose foothold in the sacred terrain is older than everyone's but the Jews. Relief only came with the news that Yasir Arafat had turned down the Camp David deal.)

I ONCE HEARD David Pryce-Jones, the learned English novelist and historian, talking about a new instance of the phenomenon of fellow-traveling: the fellow-travelers of Palestine. This, of course, has its precedents in the blind but exuberant support given to both fascism and communism by intellectuals and clerics who had concealed from themselves the evils of these two ideologies. In England, Anglican clerics were part of the establishment ambit of fascist sympathizers disguising themselves as antiwar idealists. These were the folk who soiréed at Cliveden, read and wrote in the *London Times*, chatted wittily at All Souls—appeasers all, as seen in the movie *The Remains of the Day*. And the Anglican Church also had its devotees of Stalin, the most noteworthy (or notorious) of whom was Dr. Hewlett Johnson, the "Red Dean of Canterbury," who wrote the adoring agitprop volume, *The Socialist Sixth of the World*. He was a luminary in Henry Wallace's pro-Soviet campaign for president of the United States on the Progressive Party ticket. Among Wallace's most notable supporters were bishops and other high churchmen from the mainstream American Protestant denominations.

They were silly, but they were at least prisoners of ideals. Fascist sympathizers feared the dread evil of communism, and communist sympathizers feared the dread evil of fascism. And communism purported to build a just society, a new relationship of man and man, though it turned out in many ways to be worse than fascism, more murderous, more delusional, more long-lasting. In any event, both of these

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armed doctrines tried hard to delude their followers with the lure of high ideals, some rooted in one or another version of the Christian ethic. But what vision of a good society do the ideologists of Palestine proffer to their boosters all over the world? Really nothing, except another miserable state like the others in the Arab Middle East. The new fellow-travelers lack even the feeble extenuations of the old ones.

Indeed, anyone who envisions a future Palestinian polity must wrestle with the grim and ongoing realities of a stagnant class structure, unproductive economic habits, an uncurious and increasingly reactionary culture, deeply cruel relationships between the sexes and toward gays, no notion of an independent judiciary, and a primitive religious mentality that gains prestige in society even as it emphasizes the promise of sexual rewards in paradise for martyrs—a crude myth that has served successfully as an incentive for suicide bombings not only in Israel but also in Iraq and throughout the Arab world. And no real challenge to any of these backward actualities has arisen in all of the turmoil the movement has sown.

Which takes us back to the church deleriants for Palestine. What kindles the fire in their hearts for Palestine? There is little or nothing in Palestinian society that would fill a progressive with enthusiasm. And these churches do not generally exult in the promise of yet one more nation-state. In fact, these churches are against the nation-state, especially the U.S. nation-state. (In Nottingham last week, the Anglicans demanded the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq.) And, even if you take to the harshest reading of Israeli behavior in their ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, dozens and dozens of other peoples in the world, some of whom have a much sounder claim to be a real nation than those for whom the official Anglicans and Presbyterians shed so many tears, suffer infinitely more deprivation and indignity than they do. But tears are not shed for those people at Canterbury Cathedral in England or, for that matter, at Christ Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose rectors have for years been virtual street agitators against Israel. So I come to an unavoidable conclusion. The obsession here is not positive, for one side, but rather negative, against the other side. The clerics and the lay leaders on this indefensible crusade are so fixated on Palestine because their obsession, which can be buttressed by various Christian sources and traditions, is really with the Jews. A close look at this morbid passion makes one realize that its roots include an ancient hostility for the House of Israel, an ugly survival of a hoary intolerance into some of the allegedly enlightened precincts of modern Christendom. ■

The U.S. failure to disarm Iraq's militias.

Badr to Worse

BY SPENCER ACKERMAN

THERE HAVEN'T BEEN many days during the two-year U.S. occupation of Iraq that the country appeared to be stabilizing. But, on June 7, 2004, a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) official named Terry Kelly thought he was watching one unfold. That day, Iraq's newly appointed prime minister, Iyad Allawi, announced that nine prominent militia groups—commanding 100,000 fighters between them—had agreed to disband. The militiamen—mostly from the large and professional Kurdish *peshmerga* and the Shia mini-army known as the Badr Corps, which is loyal to the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), would either enter the new Iraqi security forces, receive retraining for new civilian jobs, or draw pensions befitting retired soldiers. The deal, Allawi said, was "a watershed in establishing the rule of law."

For Kelly, it was something more. The West Point graduate had arrived in Iraq that February with the unenviable assignment of dismantling the militias—a portfolio that no previous official had held despite nearly a year of U.S. control. He understood the importance of his task: A closely held strategy paper he had written shortly after he arrived stated bluntly that "[n]o state can exist and prosper if it contains armed organizations outside of legitimate government control." But making the strategy a reality took a Herculean effort. Kelly met constantly with representatives of Iraq's militias to convince them to relinquish their power—a difficult task given the threats they faced from a Sunni-dominated insurgency and a band of Shia fighters loyal to outlaw theocrat Moqtada Al Sadr. On June 7, it looked like Kelly had achieved the impossible.

Almost exactly a year later, however, Iraq's newly elected leaders annulled Kelly's work. At a June 8 Baghdad gathering of the still-intact Badr Corps, President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, assured "the heroes of Badr" that they will have an enduring role in the new Iraq, provided they recognize the same holds for the *peshmerga*. "You and the *peshmerga* are wanted and are important to fulfilling this sacred task, to establishing a democratic, federal, and independent Iraq," Talabani said, a sentiment echoed by Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari and SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz Al Hakim. It was hardly unexpected for the Iraqi transitional government's ruling parties to bless the militias that they com-

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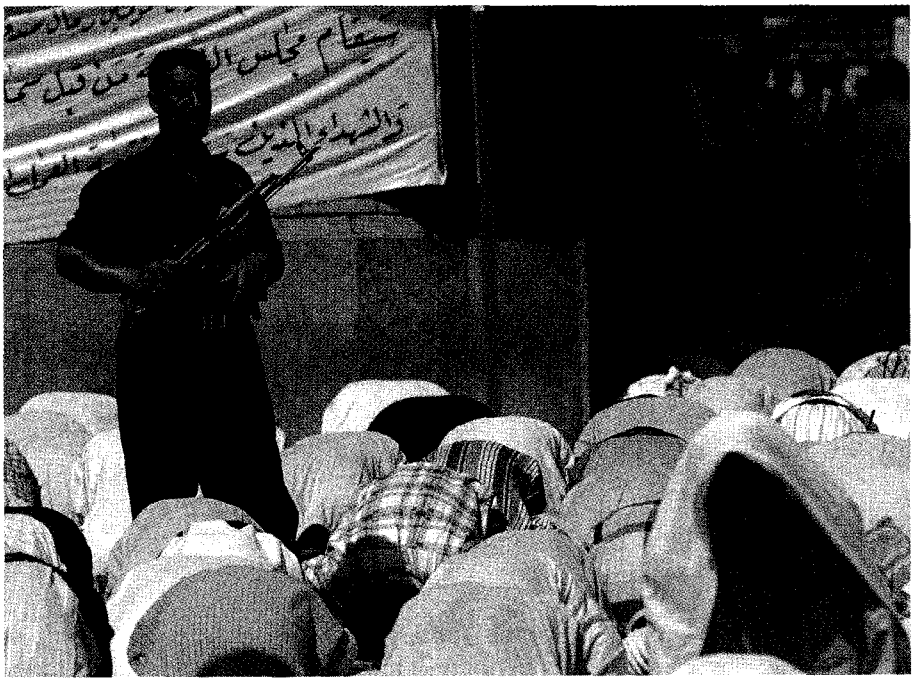
mand: Among the Kurdish demands that delayed the formation of the government after the January election was a guarantee that the *peshmerga* remain intact; and Badr veterans control six southern governorships and Iraq's interior ministry, one of the country's most powerful institutions. The *peshmerga* and Badr are further protected by the fact that their masters are among the few political parties willing to work with an unpopular foreign occupier. "From the Iraqi perspective," Kelly explains, "they're the good guys."

But, this spring, the reason the United States feared the continued presence of the "good guys" has been on vivid display. In the multiethnic flashpoint city of Kirkuk, where the Kurds want to establish their capital, Kurdish forces have kidnapped at least 180 Arabs and Turkmen, prompting American diplomats to cable Washington urgently about actions that have "greatly exacerbated tensions along purely ethnic lines." Further south, Harith Al Dhari, the leader of the influential Association of Muslim Scholars, has publicly accused the Badr Corps of responsibility for a wave of assassinations that have targeted Sunni clerics. (Badr denies the allegation.) In addition to sectarian provocation, Badr, which has ties to Iran, has used its military muscle to ensure political supremacy for SCIRI, sending militiamen to polling stations and assaulting provincial officials considered disloyal. The militias, in other words, have become a potent force for interfactional violence and social repression.

This, however, may be only the beginning. Kelly—who attempted the last, best effort to give a new Iraqi government a monopoly on the use of violence, a prerequisite for a functional state—laments that there is now practically "zero chance" for removing the militias from Iraq's political landscape. When the United States had perhaps its most promising opportunity to demobilize the militias, right after the invasion of Iraq, it did little. This early mistake allowed militias loyal to U.S.-allied parties to entrench themselves, and it also enabled the formation and expansion of extremist and anti-American militias like Sadr's Mahdi Army. With U.S. influence in Iraq diminishing rapidly and sectarianism taking on an increasingly violent cast, militias have proliferated, with only vague lines distinguishing them from criminal gangs or insurgent groups. As Kelly wrote in his 2004 strategy paper, militias "necessarily create alternate power centers that compete with the established government [and] pose the constant threat of civil unrest or war." Across Iraq, that threat is rapidly materializing. "If there's a sectarian war," says Kelly's ex-boss, David Gompert, "these are the groups who will fight it."

A member of the Shia Badr Brigade, which has not been integrated into Iraq's army, guards the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf.



AP PHOTO/KAREL PRINSLOO

WHEN LARRY CRANDALL answered his telephone in February of 2003, he learned that the Pentagon had not yet given any thought to the prospect of demobilizing either Saddam Hussein's army or the myriad guerrilla and militia groups fighting it. What security professionals call DDR—or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed factions in the aftermath of a conflict—is among the most arduous challenges of any nation-building mission. Since every conflict arises from, and ends under, unique circumstances, there aren't many lessons from past DDR operations to apply "off the shelf," as Crandall observes. He should know: As a veteran USAID official, Crandall participated in sometimes-stillborn U.S.-run DDR programs in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Haiti. "But you see what happens when you don't have a DDR program," he contends. "You're going to have some level of armed confrontation with some elements."

On the other end of his phone was a military officer Crandall calls Colonel Jim, who was attached to the recently established Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), the first incarnation of U.S. civilian authority for Iraq. Colonel Jim wanted to know if Crandall would be interested in sketching out a DDR program. "I asked, 'Why haven't you already done this work?' " Crandall recalls. "I didn't understand how screwed up [the reconstruction plan] was." Indeed, just weeks before U.S. forces invaded Iraq, the Bush administra-

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tion had no idea what it would do with Iraqi soldiers and militiamen after the downfall of Saddam.

Nevertheless, Crandall signed up. In March, he flew to Kuwait City, where ORHA had set up headquarters at the Hilton Hotel in preparation for deploying to Iraq. In Kuwait, Crandall developed the contours of what he admits was "a pretty modest program." DDR offices would be established in the Kurdish north, the Sunni center, and the Shia south. ORHA would inform ex-combatants that they were eligible for benefits if they reported to the offices for screening. There, an interview process would determine "whether they would go to jail, be pensioned out, kept in the service and perhaps retrained, or would go into a reintegration program, where they would be given a set of skills—computer training, for example—and released back into civilian life." The idea was to process the Iraqi military quickly and expand the program to the militia groups. "I didn't think this would necessarily work," he admits. "We wanted to start up the centers to see what *would* work on a modular, scalable, experimental basis. This was our best guess."

He never got to test it. ORHA chief Jay Garner liked the plan, but, in early May, President Bush replaced Garner with Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, and ORHA became the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Crandall subsequently learned he wouldn't be continuing on to Baghdad and wouldn't receive an anticipated $70 million DDR contract. His contacts in the CPA and the U.S. military told him that senior Pentagon officials thought "no taxpayer money should be spent on a defeated force." Days later, on May 23, Bremer issued CPA Order 2, which disbanded the Iraqi military without attending to the future of its nearly 400,000 officers and troops. Crandall, stunned, thought that neglecting DDR for both Saddam's army and the militias was a dangerous mistake. But the incoming CPA director for national security, Walter Slocombe, had a more sanguine view of the militias.

WHEN SLOCOMBE, AN undersecretary of defense in the Clinton administration, arrived in Baghdad that month, the United States was at the height of its post-invasion power. Many Iraqis still reserved judgment about U.S. intentions. The insurgency, while growing in strength and lethality, had not yet submerged Iraq into chaos. And it would be another two months before the CPA ceded even symbolic political power to the Iraqi Governing Council. Yet the inability to stop the initial wave of post-Saddam looting and the steady increase of violent crime in the months following the fall of Baghdad demonstrated that the United States didn't fully control the country. Iraqi politicians argued that their militias should be used to help keep the peace.

In public, the U.S. response was "unequivocal," as General Ricardo Sanchez, the commanding U.S. general in Iraq, told reporters in September of that year: "We are not going to allow private militias to operate in this country, and ... that has been communicated over and over again." But, behind closed doors in Baghdad, and on the streets in the Kurdish north and the holy areas of the Shia south, there was a different message. Slocombe says that he didn't think the militias were "a very big problem" at that point. Rather, he believed that, sometimes, allowing them to operate "was the right answer." "The police functions at these shrines should be done by religious police who basically work for the clerics who run the shrines," he says. "You can't have foreign troops doing it, and it's even tricky having Iraqi police, much less the [Iraqi] military or National Guard, do it."

Slowly, the larger militias and their political parties realized that the United States would not check their advances. Forces from the Badr Corps and the militia belonging to Iraq's oldest Shia Islamist party, Dawa, began to spread throughout the south. After the August 2003 assassination of SCIRI leader Muhammed Bakr Al Hakim, Badr marched black-clad militiamen to the shrine of Imam Ali, the holiest place in Shia Islam, while Najaf-based U.S. Marines groused about the "thugs" but did nothing. As the Badrists advanced, Shia clerics and local tribes convened their own bands of fighters to forestall SCIRI or Dawa domination. Most seriously, Sadr began building his Mahdi Army, which skirmished with Badr in Najaf for control of the Shia shrines and established its hold on the Baghdad slum of two million it renamed Sadr City. Indeed, as Sadr saw SCIRI grow stronger—with U.S. acquiescence—he felt the need to respond in kind. An Iraqi analyst told journalist Hassan Fattah for THE NEW REPUBLIC in the fall of 2003: The United States "allowed the Badr Brigades to have some power, and now he wants some, too."

With the spread of the militias and the growth of the insurgency came an argument that Slocombe began to hear on the few occasions his office broached demobilization with the militia-owning political parties. The politicians referred to their militias as an "insurance policy." As they told Slocombe, "Until you guys can actually maintain security, don't tell us to take our patrols off the street." But the "insurance policy" the militias represented for their parties also applied to politics. The Governing Council parties told Slocombe that they had every intention of disarming—once a stable constitutional order developed. He sympathized. "To be honest," he remembers, "there was an effort to say, 'We're not so stupid as to think we can simply come into a community like Kurdistan and the Shia areas, which had been so badly treated by Saddam, and expect you guys to unilaterally disarm before your potential opponents have disarmed.'"

Slocombe encouraged Governing Council militias to enter the nascent Iraqi security forces, but he was opposed to pressing the issue. "Our policy was: We're prepared to solve this over time and in a gradual way with organizations that will keep their forces under control and not become part of the problem," he says. He considered it the only realistic approach. Iraqi parties "are not going to give up their military power, which they regard, and not entirely unreasonably, as

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their ace in the hole ... until they're confident that the political process and the security structure and all that is working in a way that's acceptable to them," Slocombe argues. "As long as they don't actively cause trouble, we were prepared to tolerate a gradual approach."

THAT IS, AS long as they didn't cause trouble for the United States. What they did to Iraqis, especially moderate Iraqis, was essentially tolerated. Across the south, in late 2003, CPA officials began to notice a worrisome trend. Badr and other militiamen would perform what was euphemistically called "spontaneous de-Baathification"—assassinating those suspected of being members of the former regime. In one particularly controversial episode, Shia militiamen opened fire on a woman believed to have been a high-ranking Baathist, killing her and her baby. Then, in February 2004, Badr sought political "insurance" by flooding a Najaf "caucus" station with chanting, *abaya*-clad women intended to look like potential suicide bombers, in the hopes of swinging the selection of an interim government toward SCIRI loyalists. Pro-democracy clerics told their CPA contacts that they feared for their safety.

Additionally, the twin principles of gradualism and ignoring militias that didn't fire on U.S. troops allowed anti-U.S. militias to fester until they were strong enough to attack. That's exactly what happened with Sadr. Late in 2003, Sadr organized a violent protest of pushcart vendors outside the Imam Ali Shrine as a pretext to insert his operatives into the sacred (and strategic) location. "We began to see the beginnings of what would be the Sadrist insurrection," recalls a southern-based CPA official.

But there was little appetite to confront the radical cleric. A bedrock assumption of U.S. military planning was that the true threat to the occupation came from Sunni insurgents. Security in the Shia areas "was taken for granted," as the southern-based CPA official explains, since the Shia were believed to be sympathetic to the United States. When some American officials argued for preemptively striking the increasingly powerful Sadr, they were rebuffed. "My reasoning," explains one such official, "was tantamount to saying we had to open up another front." Only when Sadr launched his insurrection in April 2004 did CPA and military officials see their error. Major General Martin Dempsey, commander of the First Armored Division that battled the Mahdi Army, told reporters in May of that year, "Clearly, in the six months between October and April, when [Sadr] instigated this national attack, he was training troops, gaining resources, stockpiling ammunition. ... We missed the opportunity. We probably gave him six more months than we should have."

ALTHOUGH IT WOULD ultimately come too late to stem the growing assertiveness of Badr and the Mahdi Army, by the spring of 2004, the CPA's thinking on militias had already changed dramatically. Months earlier, in November 2003, the Bush administration announced that the Iraqis were to assume a measure of sovereignty in June 2004. There was no more time for "gradualism." When Slocombe ended his six-month tour, Bremer turned to RAND Corporation expert David Gompert, a close friend since both men had worked for Henry Kissinger in the 1970s. Gompert reached Baghdad on December 10, 2003. Bremer immediately told him that, despite his other responsibilities, "I need you to get smart about and then tackle this militia problem. We can't wait any longer in trying to deal with it."

Gompert had a head start. Before he left for Iraq, a notice had circulated in the monthly RAND newsletter informing interested colleagues that the CPA was seeking assistance. Among those who answered was former Army officer Terry Kelly. Though he didn't know Kelly well, Gompert was pleased: "I knew he was no-nonsense, a quick study, and could have sharp elbows when it was needed." It was needed often. When Kelly arrived in the Green Zone on February 6, 2004, Iraq's largest parties were unsure what political environment the CPA would bequeath them, making them extremely reluctant to draw down their armed forces. Kelly, despite a lack of experience with DDR, was told that he had all of two weeks to put together a policy.

Kelly and Gompert decided to focus "first and almost exclusively" on the militias controlled by Governing Council parties. Badr and the *peshmerga* represented the largest noninsurgent armed factions in Iraq, and the CPA was convinced it could work with their political masters. What's more, as they saw it, the policy should recognize that these anti-Saddam groups were, "in the truest sense, soldiers of the Iraqi people," which Kelly recalls was "tremendously useful both from a programmatic perspective and from a diplomatic perspective" when dealing with the militias. But their approach meant leaving Sadr out of any prospective arrangement, raising the question of what would happen to the Mahdi Army. It also meant that the CPA wouldn't negotiate with Sunni insurgents to see if they would cooperate. As Kelly explains, "If they're currently shooting at us, we kind of take it for granted that they don't want to engage with us." (This week, Donald Rumsfeld confirmed that American representatives have quietly held talks with insurgent-connected Sunnis in recent weeks in an attempt to draw them into the political process.)

An approach that Kelly and Gompert conspicuously ruled out—as had Slocombe—was forcible disarmament, which they considered needlessly provocative and politically untenable. "The idea that we were going to huff and puff and rattle our saber and get all these guys to show up and stack arms was just unrealistic," Gompert says. In order to determine what would work instead, Kelly had the benefit of an unlikely expert: Larry Crandall, who had returned to Iraq in January 2004 to help oversee reconstruction contracts. Not surprisingly, the program that Kelly designed was similar to Crandall's. Militias would be offered three choices for their fighters: positions in the security forces, subsidies and assis-

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tance for civilian retraining, or generous pensions befitting Army veterans. On February 22, Kelly presented what he called the Transition and Reintegration (T.R.) Strategy to Bremer and the U.S. military command.

SECURING BREMER'S APPROVAL was easy once Kelly had crafted the policy. Exponentially more difficult was getting the militias and their parties to buy in. Weekly discussions lasted hours. Gompert and Kelly soon heard every anti-demobilization argument that their predecessors had heard and more. "It's very different between the Kurds and the Badr Corps," says Gompert. "In the case of the Kurds, they're very security-minded. They think in terms of, 'How do we provide security for our people?' " From SCIRI and Badr, by contrast, Gompert and Kelly heard complaints about Coalition missteps, insufficient de-Baathification, and the rise of Sadr, which clarified something for Gompert: "They did not want to leave themselves without armed power at a critical stage in the development of politics, particularly Shia politics."

That led the CPA to seek different results from the Kurds and from SCIRI. "We never—never—suggested to the Kurds that they not have any people at arms," says Gompert. "We never said you can *keep* the *peshmerga*, and we never asked them to *give up* the *peshmerga*." The CPA's objective was to persuade the Kurds to downsize the *peshmerga*, accept positions in the Baghdad security structure, and adapt the *peshmerga* to an internal Kurdistan-based protection force—which the Kurds secured for themselves in the U.S.-brokered interim constitution signed in March 2004. But getting the Kurds to agree to the T.R. plan had an additional purpose: enticing the Badr Corps into a process that CPA would use to phase out the Shia militia entirely. "The issue was *always* the Badr Corps," Gompert emphasizes, "because of the fear of what the Badr Corps would turn into: It would mutate from a former resistance group into a tool of Shia political Islam, a tool that could be used to influence both local politics and national politics."

Kelly was blunt with the Badr Corps' leader, Hadi Al Ameri. "Our philosophy toward all these groups is, as long as you abide by your commitments, we have no problem with you." There was an element of warning as well. Kelly explained that, if the U.S. military discovered Badr militiamen performing "unauthorized security functions"—assassinations, for example—their safety could not be guaranteed. But Kelly thought the CPA should recognize that local Badr commanders possessed significant autonomy from both the Badr leadership and from SCIRI. "We also made it clear that, just because some yo-yo down in Kufa or Najaf or wherever does something stupid, it doesn't mean we're going to throw the baby out with the bathwater."

This would prove to be a controversial decision. Days after a Najaf-based CPA official, Rick Olson, demanded that Badr's Najaf commander, Haji Hassan, cease his attempts to seize political control in the city, Olson's convoy was riddled with bullets by unknown assailants. He and his entourage were lucky to survive, and Olson had to leave Iraq. Furthermore, the distinction between Badr and the Mahdi Army was not always as ironclad as SCIRI contended. A CPA investigation found that Badr and Dawa militiamen assisted Sadr in ethnically cleansing a southern gypsy village known as Qawliyya that March, a collaboration first revealed in CPA democracy adviser Larry Diamond's new memoir, *Squandered Victory*.

There were varying degrees of CPA awareness over what was happening with Badr outside of the Green Zone. When reports of Badr violence reached Baghdad, "you have to ask," says a CPA official, "is this person really affiliated [with Badr]? Is this a group decision? Or is this someone behaving criminally? I was aware of misbehavior of people on the part of Badr—even fairly significant misbehavior—but I was not convinced this was a leadership decision. ... I heard about Rick Olson. As far as I know, there is zero evidence that Badr did the ambush." But there's reason to question whether even confirmation of Badr lawlessness would have changed the calculation. For one thing, Badr militiamen *did* perform the "unauthorized security functions" Kelly warned the leadership against, with no reprisal. For another, the CPA badly needed SCIRI support for its shaky transition plans. As the southern-based CPA official recalls, "It was a complicated political dynamic in Baghdad. There were a lot of national-level equities, and there was a lot of balancing going on."

Two things ultimately drove SCIRI to the T.R. plan. First, it grew increasingly afraid of Sunni terrorist attacks against Shia civilians, which the Badr Corps could not prevent. Second, the U.S. response to Sadr's April uprising reassured SCIRI that the United States would oppose its most feared rival—while underscoring the frightening prospect of the U.S. military eventually turning its guns on Badr. Especially as it saw the Kurds win assurances of their place in the security apparatus, SCIRI officials turned to Gompert and Kelly and said, "We want opportunities in the security forces. We don't want to be discriminated against." On May 21, Bremer approved a final, detailed T.R. strategy. Shortly afterward, Order 91, issued less than a month before CPA disbanded, outlawed all militias that didn't enter into T.R. agreements with the Iraqi government. After half a year of nonstop work, Gompert and Kelly came home, cautiously optimistic that their plan would succeed.

BUT PROBLEMS WITH implementing T.R. arose even before the Allawi interim government took the reins. "I never assumed SCIRI would comply," Gompert says. "My strategy was simply to try to get them involved in programmatic implementation" that would create its own momentum. What Gompert did assume was that, as he puts it, "The longer it took to dismantle the Badr Corps, the greater the danger that it wouldn't be dismantled"—and so part of the implementation plan was to disarm Badr more rapidly than other militias. But the plan ran into trouble almost immediately, when, in early

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June, the interim defense minister, Hazem Shalaan, balked at hiring former Badr Corps fighters, telling Gompert and Kelly, "I don't want Islamists in the army, period."

Then, in August 2004, Sadr launched a second insurrection in Najaf, which ended with the Mahdi Army largely refusing the government's demand to turn in its weapons and Allawi doing little about it. As a result, the dynamic that had drawn Badr closer to T.R. was effectively reversed. SCIRI grew bolder about flouting its commitment to disarm. Last December, leader Hakim announced that, if necessary, he would order 100,000 militiamen onto the streets to safeguard the January 2005 election. Making matters worse, Allawi's administration was less interested in drawing the mainly Shia militias into the security forces than stacking them with rehired ex-Baathists, part of his plan to fight the insurgency. Indeed, the prime minister also formed his own militia forces—Sunni-led counterinsurgent teams like the Special Police Commandos, under the control of his interior minister's uncle. (The U.S. military gingerly termed them "pop-ups," since, as one officer explained to *The Wall Street Journal*, militias are "illegal.")

Each move by one militia—and insurgent group—to gather strength demanded a countermeasure from its rivals. What Allawi once described as a "watershed for the rule of law" degenerated into a situation where the law played little part in the calculations of powerful political leaders intent on maximizing their advantage—in many cases, the same people entrusted with enforcing the anti-militia law. Under Order 91, any militia-wielding party is subject not only to criminal prosecution but also to potential ineligibility to hold office. Yet the Badr Corps itself has representatives in parliament. Not only is SCIRI a major component of the ruling United Iraqi Alliance bloc, but ex-Badr militiaman Bayan Jabr is now Iraq's interior minister—the official charged with monitoring T.R. compliance. The party's stated support for T.R. reached true absurdity in April, when now–Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi of SCIRI lamented to Knight Ridder, "If you had a political crisis and each militia will go and support their party or political force, then you would have a very critical situation." Badr militiamen guarded his office as he spoke.

The cynicism of Mehdi's comment highlights the assumption behind the CPA's approach to the militias: To work, it required a virtuous circle of broader political development and improving security. If security increased around the country and Iraqis reconciled their deep religious and ethnic divisions, the parties would no longer require paramilitary "insurance policies." Originally, in 2003, the CPA figured the virtuous circle was already on its way; when it didn't materialize, in 2004, CPA security officials crafted the T.R. strategy to get it rolling. "When we say that we reached agreements with all these folks and we're solving the militia problems," says Kelly, "the understanding is the political and security situation must remain stable and continue to mature." Adds Gompert, "I'm not sure there was a strategy that would *not* have been dependent on a virtuous circle."

But the virtuous circle has given way to a vicious one. Badr intimidation, according to *The Washington Post*, has driven at least one provincial police force into open collaboration with the rival Mahdi Army. On the streets of Basra, Badr militiamen enforce Islamic dictates, leading one terrified Iraqi to compare them to Saddam's secret police in an interview with a *Los Angeles Times* reporter. Under Jabr, Badr personnel do join the Interior Ministry, but, as they do, one adviser alleged to Knight Ridder's Tom Lasseter, Sunni officials are being dismissed by the dozens, suggesting that what remains of Kelly's strategy is less integration than infiltration. The result is deepening anti-Shia sentiment among prominent Sunni organizations, such as the Association of Muslim Scholars, which is connected to the insurgency. In turn, as Sunni terrorism against the Shia has intensified, it has given birth to "bands of young men led by young Shia clerics who have had enough," as Nibras Kazimi recently described to *The New York Sun*. Such Shia militias have marched through Haifa Street, an arterial road in central Baghdad known by American soldiers as Purple Heart Boulevard, announcing, "If anyone in our neighborhood is killed, we will respond by killing people in Haifa."

THE FAILURE OF the United States to disarm Iraq's militias is emblematic of its larger failures in Iraq—that is, the failure to have understood the enormity of the task of occupying and rebuilding the country. In Gompert's words, "It was only by the end of the CPA that we were beginning to do what we should have been ready to do from day one, to deal with a totally knowable problem. That's not a criticism of my predecessor, it's not a criticism of Jerry Bremer. If it's a criticism, it's a criticism that we as a country did not go in with all the tools that we were going to use." Or knowledge of how to use them. The U.S. military's enduring belief that the Sunni insurgency is the principal threat to Iraq argues strongly that additional troops would not have been used to discourage militia activity—cutting against the conventional wisdom that disaster might have been mitigated if only the administration had invaded with a larger force.

The idea that the allies the United States chose in Iraq could end up posing a threat of a different order—one that entrenches Sunni support for the insurgency and contributes significantly to the unraveling of Iraq—rarely influenced decision-making until it was too late. President Bush's meeting last week with Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, whose Dawa party commands its own militia, suggests it still doesn't, even as the U.S. ability to change direction evaporates. Kelly contends, with some justification, that the plan he crafted can't be considered a "complete failure," since it enabled the militia-wielding parties to at least join the political process. "It was not clear when I got there that they were going to be part of the solution, and they are currently part of the solution," he says. "Or, at least, the solution that we're working with." ■

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Policies aren't what matter in politics.

The Case Against New Ideas

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

Ideas—the *idea* of ideas, anyway—have always held a lofty place in our political culture. But perhaps never before have they been imbued with such power as at this particular moment. Since last November, conservatives have been braying about their victory in the war of ideas, often with a whiff of Marxian assurance. "Conservatism is the ideology of the future," gloated Republican National Committee Chairman Ken Mehlman. "Republicans are driving the course of history with new solutions." A GOP operative, even while conceding President Bush's recent difficulties, noted that things would be worse but for the fact that "the Democrats are really brain dead and have nothing positive to put on the table."

Oddly enough, it's not just conservatives who say this. Liberals, too, widely attribute their minority party status to a lack of new ideas. "Feeling outmatched in the war of ideas," *The New York Times* noted last month, "liberal groups have spent years studying conservative foundations the way Pepsi studies Coke, searching for trade secrets." Or, as *Washington Monthly* Editor-in-Chief Paul Glastris wrote last December, "[Y]es, there is plenty of blame to go around, from an admirable but not widely loved presidential candidate to his stunningly ineffective strategists. But at this point, it requires a willful act of self-deception not to see the deeper problem: conservatives have won the war of ideas." Since the 2004 elections, liberals have earnestly set about writing manifestos, establishing new think-tanks, and generally endeavoring to catch up with a conservative idea machine.

The notion that conservatives are winning politically because they are winning intellectually has a certain appeal, particularly for those in the political idea business. And the aspiration of liberals to sharpen their thinking is perfectly worthy. As analysis, though, it's all deeply misguided. The current ubiquity of such thinking owes itself to the fact that liberals and conservatives have a shared interest in promoting it. (Liberals in the spirit of exhortation and internal reform, conservatives in the spirit of self-congratulation.) But, more than that, it reflects a naïveté about the power of new ideas, one that is deeply rooted in long-standing misconceptions of how our politics operate.

To begin with, the plain fact is that liberals have plenty of new ideas. Troll websites of the Center for American Progress, the Brookings Institution, or the Century Foundation, and you will find them teeming with six- and twelve-point plans for any problem you can imagine: securing loose nuclear weapons, reforming public education, promoting international trade, bolstering the military, and so on. They get churned out by the shelfful providing more material than any presidential administration could hope to enact.

And these are not merely retreads of old wish lists. The best liberal ideas take account of new information. Noting academic findings that most workers base their savings decisions on simple inertia, Brookings scholar Peter Orszag and others have proposed automatic 401(k) enrollment. Yale's Jacob S. Hacker (writing in The New Republic and elsewhere) has shown that Americans face growing fluctuations in their income, and he is working on a total income security plan.

Indeed, devising earnest new ideas is the very thing liberals enjoy the most. Accusing them of having no new ideas is like accusing a member of the Kennedy family of excessive sobriety: If anything, the actual problem is just the opposite. Liberals have way too many new ideas and don't think seriously enough about prioritizing them. Liberal think tanks have plans for overhauling health care, slashing the deficit, creating progressive savings accounts, beefing up homeland security, and so on. The trouble is that it would be hard to do all these things at once.

Now, one might point out that liberal intellectuals have plenty of new ideas, but Democrats in elected office do not. That, however, isn't true either. In 2004, John Kerry and John Edwards ran on a program that was undeniably substantive. They proposed rolling back a large chunk of Bush's tax cuts and dividing the proceeds between deficit-reduction and a number of spending programs, including a fairly innovative health care plan that involved reimbursing employers for catastrophic costs. Democrats in Congress do spend most of their time reacting to an agenda controlled by Republicans. But they have proposed a higher minimum wage, terrorism risk insurance for private businesses, legalizing the importation of prescription drugs, and reinstituting pay-as-you-go budget rules.

You probably don't remember many of these ideas, if you ever heard of them in the first place. But don't feel guilty. There's a perfectly good reason for ignoring these ideas: They have no chance of being enacted as long as Republicans control the White House and Congress. The truth is that liberal ideas aren't getting any circulation because Democrats are out of power, not vice versa. Not long ago, to take an example almost at random, Senate Democrats held a press conference with James Woolsey to unveil an energy-independence agenda. Not a single major newspaper or network covered it. This isn't because reporters harbor a

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bias against liberals. It's because they harbor a bias against ideas that stand no chance of being enacted. And so, the vast majority of the time, the press will simply ignore ideas put forth by the minority party. Or those ideas will simply be dismissed as impractical. Take this passage from a column last month by *Newsweek*'s Robert Samuelson:

> In floor debate, the Democrats never offered a realistic balanced budget. The closest they came was in the House, where they promised balance by 2012.

Samuelson is, in a certain sense, correct. Any plan that differs substantially from the Republican agenda is unrealistic, because the Republicans would never even consider it. But to mistake this lack of power for a lack of alternate ideas confuses cause and effect.

Indeed, during the first two years of Bill Clinton's presidency, Democrats had all the positive ideas, and Republicans found themselves in a position of reflexive opposition: no health care reform, no deficit reduction, no crime bill. *The Washington Post* asked at the time, "Why are the Republicans, who generated so many new ideas a decade ago, suddenly reaching backward on economic issues?" Was this because Republicans had run out of ideas? No, it was because they opposed the particular ideas that the party in power had thrust into the national spotlight. Once Republicans won control of Congress on a wave of anti-Clinton anger, it became clear that they had plenty of specific ideas of their own. (At which point the public ran screaming back to Clinton.)

Today, Democrats generally oppose change because "change" means doing things Bush's way. This puts Democrats in the dilemma of either supporting new policies that are almost invariably bad—certainly from a liberal perspective—or appearing wedded to the status quo. Indeed, Bush has shrewdly exploited this dilemma. In 2001, Democrats conceded that the government needed to do something to stimulate economic growth and forestall a recession. What resulted was a Republican plan to shift the tax burden downward and hemorrhage red ink. In 2003, Democrats advocated added prescription-drug coverage to Medicare. Bush used the occasion to hand out hundreds of billions of dollars in giveaways to industry backers.

It's one thing for Democrats to sketch out the sort of alternatives they would prefer if they ran Washington. But, as long as Republicans *do* run Washington—and certainly as long as Bush sits in the Oval Office—doing nothing is often going to be the best available scenario for liberals. Emphasizing the downside of bad change rather than the upside of positive change reflects political necessity, not intellectual failure.

SOME OF THOSE who excoriate Democrats and liberals for lacking ideas don't mean, when they say "ideas," specific plans of action. They mean something more abstract—a philosophical schema for governing, which often amounts to a slogan to describe one's ideology. It is certainly true that conservatives enjoy a long-standing edge here. Bush and his supporters have described their policies with simple aphorisms—smaller government, for example, or promoting democracy abroad—that have eluded Democrats. But Republicans often fail to abide by their own ideas. While Karl Rove recently asserted, "We believe in curbing the size of government; they believe in expanding the size of government," government has in fact grown significantly under Bush after shrinking under his Democratic predecessor. In this case, the conservative superiority in "ideas" simply reflects a greater capacity for hypocrisy.

Conservatives recognize the administration's failures to abide by its professed principles, especially on the growth of government, but this recognition seems not to temper their ideological triumphalism. They seem to spend half their time complaining about Bush's ideological infidelity and the other half celebrating their unambiguous victory in the war of ideas. An example of the latter can be found in a long, self-congratulatory essay in the May issue of *Commentary*, in which former Olin Foundation Director James Piereson asserts, "[N]ot only has conservatism risen to prominence in the electoral sphere, but conservative thought has seized the initiative in the world of ideas as well."

The conservatives' celebration of their intellectual triumph is further complicated by their oft-professed hostility toward intellectuals. They attempt to square this circle by portraying conservative intellectuals as merely channeling the authentic popular will. Irving Kristol famously said the role of conservatives was "to show the American people that they are right and the intellectuals are wrong." One imagines Kristol, Piereson, and other conservative elites relaxing in working-class bars; listening to the denizens demand the privatization of Social Security or complain about the burdens of the estate tax; and then discovering, to their surprise and glee, that there were indeed corporations and wealthy individuals willing to fund the expression of such ideas.

While it has been fashionable to call Republicans the party of ideas for the last 25 years or so, it is all the more so now. The best case that can be made for this label is on foreign policy, where Bush has busily set out to expand democracy across the globe while Democrats carp. Yet, even here, there is far less than meets the eye.

The idea of spreading democracy may be a powerful one, but we shouldn't forget that it's an ad hoc rationale for the Iraq war—hastily put forward after Bush's primary justification, weapons of mass destruction, fell apart. If Bush believed in democracy-promotion as a central goal of the war, he didn't trust the public enough to make that argument (rather than the scary prospect of Saddam giving weapons to terrorists) anything more than a footnote to his prewar case. And, when it comes to those places that pose the greatest long-term danger, Iran and North Korea, even conservatives admit the administration is bereft of ideas.

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Most important, the president (and his party) always dominate foreign policy thinking. The tools of statecraft lie in the hands of the executive branch. Nearly every modern president, however inept his foreign policy, manages to have a doctrine named after him. (Remember the Carter Doctrine?) Again, a comparison with the Clinton years is instructive. Democrats in the White House talked about a new era of humanitarian intervention, while Republicans grumbled sullenly. ("We should not send our troops to stop ethnic cleansing and genocide outside of our national strategic interests," insisted George W. Bush.) That Bush is the one promoting powerful ideas, with Democrats largely on the sidelines, simply shows the degree to which control of the White House determines which party holds the initiative on foreign policy ideas.

What other examples exist to support the notion that conservatives have built an awesome ideas machine? The one most often invoked is privatizing Social Security. And, on the surface, it seems like a potent case. Conservative think tanks have spent years nurturing the idea of transforming Social Security, partially or entirely, into a system of individual accounts. Certainly, the history of privatization attests to the right's ability to take hold of an idea hopelessly out of the mainstream and inexorably drive it into the center of the national debate.

Yet privatization isn't a good idea. By this, I don't mean that I disagree with the concept of privatizing Social Security, although I do. What I mean is that the idea itself is half-baked. After Bush declared his intention to focus on privatization this year, it soon became clear that conservatives hadn't thought through a number of enormous obstacles to their idea's implementation. For instance, they seem not to have considered that their optimistic assumptions about the long-term return to stocks are nearly impossible to square with their pessimistic assumptions about the long-term finances of Social Security. Nor did they figure out how to offset the costs of new accounts, which caused the administration to propose clawbacks that could lead to such awkward scenarios as a worker dying and his dependents owing money to the federal government. (Don't ask.) And, as Brookings economist Martin Mayer has noted, mandatory annuities proposed by Bush would make retirees enormously sensitive to any changes the Federal Reserve makes to interest rates just before they retire. The list of similar problems is distressingly long. The more policy aficionados study Bush's idea, the more it looks like something cooked up by a throng of idealistic Ayn Rand–reading undergraduates fresh from Econ 101.

Privatization also points to another weakness in the conservative idea machine: its inability to address the problems of the day. The concept of privatization has slowly ground forward over 25 years or more, propelled by an endless stream of conferences, papers, and articles from conservative think tanks and magazines. And Bush has sold it as a response to a looming fiscal disaster. By any objective measure, though, Social Security is not a major fiscal problem compared with the deficit or health care. Health care, in fact, is rapidly bankrupting both the government and the private sector.

Here the comparison between right and left is instructive. Liberals are brimming with ideas about reforming health care and taming the deficit. Conservatives have little to say about either of these problems. On the deficit, they are theologically opposed to raising taxes, and they have learned from Newt Gingrich that massive spending cuts are political poison. On health care, controlling costs means controlling waste, yet much of that waste is income for interest groups closely aligned with the Republican Party, such as pharmaceuticals, HMOs, and insurance companies. The GOP, then, may be the party of ideas in the sense that its ideas have slowly and inexorably ground forward over a long period of time like glaciers over the Ice Age landscape. But, if this process leaves them unable to confront the actual problems facing the country, you have to wonder why this is something liberals ought to emulate.

The point here is not that conservatives want for new ideas. It's that the question of which ideas hold sway is a function of which party holds power and what priorities it has. It is certainly true that conservatives have devoted more energy to the question of fundamentally reshaping Social Security. But this difference has nothing to do with who has more or better ideas and everything to do with priorities. Liberals like Columbia University's Jeffrey Sachs have devoted lots of energy to devising plans to end world poverty. Liberals have devoted enormous attention to the problem of global warming, while the Bush administration insists it will kill any action on the topic.

Is this because conservatives have no ideas, or are committed to (as Bush recently described Democrats) "the philosophy of the stop sign, the agenda of the roadblock"? No, it's because conservatives philosophically disagree with those ends. These aren't contests of which side has more or better ideas. These are ideological battles over resource allocation. When Democrats regain power, their ideas will again control the agenda, and Republicans will again find themselves devoted primarily to the task of resisting change.

GIVEN ALL THIS, why does everybody say the right has won the war of ideas? To answer the question, you must first understand that different people mean completely different things when they say that Democrats have no new ideas. And some of those who call for Democrats to come up with new ideas don't actually mean that at all.

One meaning has surfaced from Republicans with particular frequency during the Social Security debate. "[T]he only idea offered by Democrats is that [Bush] abandon his plans to reform Social Security altogether," lamented *Weekly Standard* Executive Editor Fred Barnes last month. "George Bush has been willing to address a long-term, politically thorny problem," observed David Brooks in the *Times*. "But his Democratic counterparts are behaving like

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alienated junior professors. No productive ideas. No sense of leadership." In reality, Democrats have explicitly stated their willingness to address Social Security's future deficit as long as privatization is off the table. So, when conservatives decry Democrats' lack of ideas, they mean a refusal to adopt conservative ideas.

Liberal pundits also like to flay Democrats for lacking positive ideas, but they mean something else entirely. "If the Democrats had a brain, they'd. . . ." is a familiar mainstay of the op-ed pages and the chat shows. For instance, *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius argued two months ago, "A sensible Democratic leadership would gather this very weekend to begin formulating a plan to address America's looming economic crises. These party leaders would develop specific proposals to reduce the trade and budget deficits that are spooking the financial markets. . . . They would reject Bush's half-baked plan for private accounts, but at the same time they would give the president political cover to do what's necessary to begin matching future benefits to future revenue."

Just last month, another *Post* columnist, Steven Pearlstein, chimed in, "Having railed against them in vain for the past five years, you'd think Democrats might try to reframe the issue on tax fairness." In a recent *Times* column, Thomas L. Friedman wrote, "Democrats [are] so clearly out of ideas." Friedman's ideas? Promoting alternative fuels, "a new New Deal to address the insecurities of the age of globalization," stem-cell research, and action on global warming.

Of course, the above describes the Democratic position almost perfectly. It seems odd, but in fact this sort of thing is quite common: One constantly hears impassioned demands that the Democrats do exactly what they are already doing. Often, this confusion simply reflects the Democrats' inability to publicize their ideas—or frustration at their inability to win political victories in GOP-dominated Washington. (I can't tell you how many conversations I've had in which liberal friends ask why the Democratic leaders aren't simply saying that Bush's tax cuts are unaffordable and go to the rich, when in fact they are doing so with stultifying repetitiveness.) Sometimes it's merely a rhetorical device used by pundits to express their own liberal views while appearing nonpartisan.

BUT THE CONSTANT invoking of the idea gap isn't entirely, or even mostly, disingenuous. Lots of politicians and analysts earnestly believe it. They believe it because they buy into a set of shared assumptions, usually unstated, about how U.S. politics works. The central assumption is that politics revolves around issues and ideas—rather than things like personality, tactics, and outside circumstances—and that the party that wins is the one that presents a more compelling vision of the future.

Because this interpretation is so widely shared, it is usually offered as a statement of faith, with little or no substantiation. *Washington Post* columnist Sebastian Mallaby articulated this conviction in a column last year. "Candidates (and especially challengers) win elections by offering compelling visions, and those visions have to be based on real policies," he wrote. "Clinton won in 1992 not just because of Carville's slogan, catchy though it may have been; he won because he was prepared to grapple publicly with thorny issues, from the sources of American competitiveness to the pros and cons of NAFTA." In June of 2000, *U.S. News* columnist and longtime Washington eminence David Gergen wrote, "There is a good reason why Governor Bush is forging ahead in this race: He is becoming the candidate of fresh ideas."

This sort of interpretation is common among journalists. Up until the day of an election, the energies of the candidates and their observers revolve around which side has the stronger turnout operation, whose ads work more, which candidate hurts himself by putting the wrong kind of cheese on his cheesesteak sandwich, and other minutiae. Immediately after the voting, the locus of analysis switches completely, and the election is retroactively determined to be a referendum on the candidates' platforms.

Alas, this sort of thinking assumes a wildy optimistic level of discernment by voters. Polls consistently show that large swaths of the voting public know very little about the positions taken by candidates. In 2000, the National Annenberg Election Survey found that just 57 percent of voters knew Al Gore was more liberal than Bush, 51 percent knew he was more supportive of gun control, and a mere 46 percent understood that he was more supportive of abortion rights. "The voting behavior literature, which is massive, shows that people are not particularly idea-driven," explains Berkeley political scientist Nelson Polsby. "They don't know what the fashions are, with respect to what ideas go with other ideas."

Political scientists have shown how factors like economic performance and the rally-around-the-flag effect can exert enormous influence over voting behavior. A recent study in *Science* magazine was even more disturbing to those who believe in the power of ideas. Scientists showed the subjects pairs of photographs, which turned out to be matched candidates in Senate and House races. The subjects had to judge within one second which candidate looked more competent, on the basis of appearance alone. Their choice matched the candidate who won an astounding 71.6 percent of the time in Senate races. If you consider that a decent share of Senate races pit unknown, underfunded challengers against popular incumbents in highly partisan states, that is a remarkably high percentage. Faith in the discernment of the public is not based on proof, it's premised on, well, faith.

This idealistic belief in the power of the voters to judge superior policy ideas has deep roots. Alexis de Tocqueville noted how it is customary for Americans to speak flatteringly of the public in the unquestioning way that Europeans speak flatteringly of their monarchs. More to the point, it is often in both sides' interest to think this way. Bill Clinton's 1992 victory has been widely attributed to his bold New Democrat–populist platform, in contrast with

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George H.W. Bush's tired defense of the status quo.

Democrats accede to this interpretation for the obvious reasons. Republicans accede to it because they see Bush as an ideological apostate and are therefore eager to paint his defeat as a consequence of his infidelity to conservative dogma. But, while Clinton's innovative platform surely helped him seize the political center, other factors—a sluggish economy, a third-party candidate disproportionately hurting Bush, and Clinton's charisma—surely mattered more.

This idealism retreated somewhat after the 2000 elections. (Given that his opponent received more votes, it was awkward to paint Bush's triumph as a consequence of his ideas.) But it has returned in full force after the 2004 elections. There is plenty of evidence that the rise in Bush's stature after September 11, as well as John Kerry's ineptitude as a candidate, played a decisive role. But both sides have emphasized instead the role of ideas.

If elections themselves don't hinge on competing ideas, then at least ideas can shape the long-term ideological terrain, right? That's the story both right and left have been telling. In his *Commentary* essay, Piereson wrote that, in the immediate postwar years, American businessmen "did not understand the link between ideas and political movements, and therefore did not see the need to mount a sustained intellectual defense of their own interests." Piereson does not explain what persuaded them to abandon their lack of interest and aggressively fund conservative think tanks and foundations. Liberals—who have developed a fascination with corporations and the rise of conservative institutions—have an explanation of their own. They invest enormous importance in a memo written by Lewis Powell in 1971, making the case that corporate America must aggressively defend its interests.

My colleague John B. Judis, though, has a far more convincing explanation than a memo that changed the world. In February, he wrote in these pages that businesses adopted a more aggressive and self-interested stance because the U.S. economy changed. In the 25 years after World War II, U.S. business enjoyed a dominant and cushioned position. Therefore business leaders could afford to accommodate unions and reasonable regulations. But, as the rest of the world eventually caught up, profit margins shrank and businesses began fighting unions and looking to Washington to cut their taxes, eliminate regulations, and institute other changes geared toward their bottom line. The cultivation of conservative ideas certainly played a role. But the great shift in U.S. politics resulted not from the persuasive powers of conservative intellectuals but dramatic changes in underlying material conditions.

A RELATED ASSUMPTION IS that new ideas are better than old ones. This meme has gained particular currency during the Social Security debate. For instance, conservative privatization advocate Peter Ferrara dismissed liberal foe Robert Ball as a "well-meaning gentleman who hasn't had a new idea in 40 years." The accusation resonates with many liberals. The Democrats' economic policy, as labor leader Andrew Stern told Matt Bai of *The New York Times Magazine*, "is basically being opposed to Republicans and protecting the New Deal. It makes me realize how vibrant the Republicans are in creating twenty-first-century ideas, and how sad it is that we're defending 60-year-old ideas."

The elevation of new over old is one of those beliefs that can only survive as a background assumption, without any critical scrutiny. Nobody tries to explain why new is inherently better, because the notion is obviously ridiculous. Take Social Security, for instance. Whatever you think of the general virtues of privatization, the program has actually grown more, not less, suited to the character of the U.S. economy over the last several decades. Social Security is designed to safeguard individuals from various risks. As the economy has grown significantly riskier, the need for a program that offers people a risk-free financial bedrock has grown stronger, and the case for subjecting the program itself to more market risk has grown more dubious.

The final cause of the idea-centric view of U.S. politics is that ideas are sexy. Wealthy donors seem to be particularly prone to ideophilia. Bai recounts how Democratic operative Rob Stein showed a now semi-famous slide presentation detailing the $300-million-per-year conservative message machine to venture capitalist Andy Rappaport. "Man," Rappaport replied, "that's all it took to buy the country?" Both conservatives and liberals talk about the "battle of ideas" as though political success were simply a matter of having one thousand policy entrepreneurs chained to one thousand keyboards.

This conception of U.S. politics is especially compelling to intellectuals. It is a vision of a noble landscape in which philosopher kings hold sway. Each side has its visionaries, wonks, and pamphleteers, beavering away to see whose ideological manifestos, new syntheses, and ten-point plans will prove decisive in the next election. Writers and thinkers enjoy a heroic central role in shaping history: We—not grubby factors like attack ads or the state of the economy or the candidates' ease before the cameras—hold the future in our hands. Twenty years ago, Tom Wolfe appeared before a gathering of conservatives in Washington and declared that Marxism's appeal lay in its "implicit secret promise ... of handing power over to the intellectuals." The promise is not confined to Marxism. It seems to have seduced everybody. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

An Arrival

THE STANDARD FOR **ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW** is stated in the middle of the picture. The director of a center for modern art tells her assistant that her criterion for selecting pieces is that they could not have been made in another era. This film is most assuredly of our time. Here are a few things that happen in it. A young man separating from his wife sets his hand on fire so that his two sons will remember the day as significant. Two eighteen-year-old girls compete in fellatio skill on a fourteen-year-old boy. A seven-year-old boy makes a coprophiliac date via the Internet, and on the park bench where they meet he encounters a mature woman. (She kisses him ruefully and leaves.)

Usually it is unfair to cite bizarre moments in a film, because they may have an altered effect, integral, when they appear in context. But the integration happens so successfully in this film that to mention these moments first is to affirm the exceptional quality of the picture. There's another point: these moments and some others are proof of a basic assumption. The film-maker, Miranda July, treats the bizarre moments without bravery or bravado. She assumes that her audience, like herself, is at ease in this era.

July wrote and directed and plays the leading role. She has made short films, performance pieces, and videos, and has published stories in *The Paris Review*. Without much difficulty we can see that *Me and You* is the creation of an artist who has been working outside the common strictures of film-making and has now moved, as her unmediated self, into features. This is our good luck.

Before sketching the story (or stories), I note the kinship that this film has with much modern work in all the arts. It begins as if it were completely discarding conventional design and form. July starts discursively: she seems to deal with whatever interests her next. But before long, she adds to the discursive manner—without losing it—some solid story strands. Before the picture is half along, it has become a romantic comedy. Still, it is a long way in texture and tenor from even the less conventional comedies we know (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, for instance). We can suspect that July is chuckling twice: at her avant-garde friends who were beguiled by her freehand style into following this ultimately symmetrical work, and also at her new general audience, who, after they were ready for arcane art, had convention slipped over on them.

Richard is a shoe salesman at a department store in a bleak Los Angeles district. He is married, and at the start his wife is moving out. They have two sons, the boys mentioned above: Peter, the older, and Robby. It is part of the film's mode that no one ever mentions that this is a biracial marriage: Richard is white, his wife is black, the boys are mocha. Never, now or later, are marital disputes or father-and-child abrasions or neighbors' comments ever touched by racial reference. This is not because of oxygenated liberalism, but because it would be out of key, prosaic, in a picture so extraordinary that a father sets fire to his hand.

Moving along, with the camera always curious about details along the way, we meet Christine, who is an artist trying to place her work in the local center for modern art. Meanwhile she supports herself by using her car as a taxi. She takes a customer, an elderly man, to buy a pair of shoes, and in the shop she meets Richard, by whom she is sexually struck. Though he deals with her only as a cool salesman, she is dazzled. The rest of the film is largely concerned with her attempts to get a response from him. But Richard is still vibrating from wife troubles and is much concerned about his boys. After one of Christine's failed attempts to interest him, she disconsolately scrawls "FUCK" on her windshield as she drives away, and thus the standard movie shot of watching a car's progress through its windshield has an added element.

Less of a subplot than a sexual counterpoint is the story about Rebecca and Heather, two eighteen-year-olds who attract the attention of Andrew, Richard's sales colleague and neighbor. Andrew's way of enticing the girls is to put up salacious placards in the window of his apartment, and, after their fellating practice with Peter, they decide to take Andrew up. But he hides in panic. There is an even younger counterpoint, not sexual though vaguely related to it. Robby makes friends with a girl about his age who is collecting things for her marital hope chest. He contributes. Through much of the above, lazy pillowy music floats along, possibly as if to cushion the fact that only the main story, Christine and Richard, reaches any sort of conclusion.

The acting is all that it needs to be. Heather and Rebecca are Natasha Slayton and Najarra Townsend, who have the unnerving competence of some very young people. This is even truer of Miles Thompson and Brandon Ratcliff as the two sons. The casting of John Hawkes as Richard is obviously part of July's intent to disguise convention. Hawkes is a perfectly good actor, but he is not at all a romantic lead. His face is vulpine. There is more to July's use of him than a proof that non-beautiful people fall in and out of love: she is subverting Romeo requirements.

And there is, somewhat overwhelmingly, July herself. This is scarcely the first time that a leading role has been played by the film's writer-director—let's just mention Woody Allen—but besides the fact that her screenplay's dialogue has a spanking fresh tang throughout, besides

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the fact that her directing is intimate without crowding, July's performance is startlingly delicate. Personally, she is pleasant without being remarkable, but her performance is fine filigree. It is small-scale work—intelligent glances, subtle inflections, modest gestures—a style that is the fruit of one hundred years of film plus television. She plays Christine with reticence, convincing us that what we see and hear are only hints of the simmering in this woman.

July's background in the field of avant-garde art has given her a view of film that, since it is joined with remarkable talent, is bracing for the rest of the film world. She treats film personally, idiosyncratically, as presumably she treats her other work; yet, as with some modern art, a gentle, knowing cleverness suffuses it. It seems quite possible that *Me and You* marks the arrival of an artist who may affect—disturbingly yet helpfully—films and audiences to come. ■

Alvaro Vargas Llosa

The Killing Machine

Che Guevara, from communist firebrand to capitalist brand.

CHE GUEVARA, WHO DID SO much (or was it so little?) to destroy capitalism, is now a quintessential capitalist brand. His likeness adorns mugs, hoodies, lighters, key chains, wallets, baseball caps, toques, bandannas, tank tops, club shirts, couture bags, denim jeans, herbal tea, and of course those omnipresent T-shirts with the photograph, taken by Alberto Korda, of the socialist heartthrob in his beret during the early years of the revolution, as Che happened to walk into the photographer's viewfinder—and into the image that, thirty-eight years after his death, is still the logo of revolutionary (or is it capitalist?) chic. Sean O'Hagan claimed in *The Observer* that there is even a soap powder with the slogan "Che washes whiter."

Che products are marketed by big corporations and small businesses, such as the Burlington Coat Factory, which put out a television commercial depicting a youth in fatigue pants wearing a Che T-shirt, or Flamingo's Boutique in Union City, New Jersey, whose owner responded to the fury of local Cuban exiles with this devastating argument: "I sell whatever people want to buy." Revolutionaries join the merchandising frenzy, too—from "The Che Store," catering to "all your revolutionary needs" on the Internet, to the Italian writer Gianni Minà, who sold Robert Redford the movie rights to Che's diary of his juvenile trip around South America in 1952 in exchange for access to the shooting of the film *The Motorcycle Diaries* so that Minà could produce his own documentary. Not to mention Alberto Granado, who accompanied Che on his youthful trip and advises documentarists, and now complains in Madrid, according to *El País*, over Rioja wine and duck magret, that the American embargo against Cuba makes it hard for him to collect royalties. To take the irony further: the building where Guevara was born in Rosario, Argentina, a splendid early twentieth-century edifice at the corner of Urquiza and Entre Ríos Streets, was until recently occupied by the private pension fund AFJP Máxima, a child of Argentina's privatization of social security in the 1990s.

The metamorphosis of Che Guevara into a capitalist brand is not new, but the brand has been enjoying a revival of late—an especially remarkable revival, since it comes years after the political and ideological collapse of all that Guevara represented. This windfall is owed substantially to *The Motorcycle Diaries*, the film produced by Robert Redford and directed by Walter Salles. (It is one of three major motion pictures on Che either made or in the process of being made in the last two years; the other two have been directed by Josh Evans and Steven Soderbergh.) Beautifully shot against landscapes that have clearly eluded the eroding effects of polluting capitalism, the film shows the young man on a voyage of self-discovery as his budding social conscience encounters social and economic exploitation—laying the ground for a New Wave re-invention of the man whom Sartre once called the most complete human being of our era.

But to be more precise, the current Che revival started in 1997, on the thirtieth anniversary of his death, when five biographies hit the bookstores, and his remains were discovered near an airstrip at Bolivia's Vallegrande airport, after a retired Bolivian general, in a spectacularly timed revelation, disclosed the exact location. The anniversary refocused attention on Freddy Alborta's famous photograph of Che's corpse laid out on a table, foreshortened and dead and romantic, looking like Christ in a Mantegna painting.

It is customary for followers of a cult not to know the real life story of their hero, the historical truth. (Many Rastafarians would renounce Haile Selassie if they had any notion of who he really was.) It is not surprising that Guevara's contemporary followers, his new post-communist admirers, also delude themselves by clinging to a myth—except the young Argentines who have come up with an expression that rhymes perfectly in Spanish: "*Tengo una remera del Che y no sé por qué,*" or "I have a Che T-shirt and I don't know why."

CONSIDER SOME OF THE PEOple who have recently brandished or invoked Guevara's likeness as a beacon of justice and rebellion against the abuse of power. In Lebanon, demonstrators protesting against Syria at the grave of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri carried Che's image. Thierry Henry, a French soccer player who plays for Arsenal, in England, showed up at a major gala organized by FIFA, the world's soccer body, wearing a red and black Che T-

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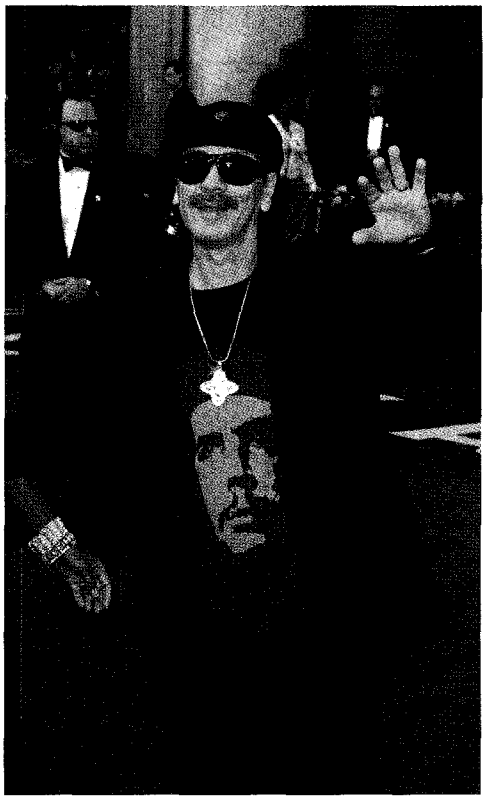
shirt. In a recent review in *The New York Times* of *George A. Romero's Land of the Dead*, Manohla Dargis noted that "the greatest shock here may be the transformation of a black zombie into a righteous revolutionary leader," and added, "I guess Che really does live, after all." The soccer hero Maradona showed off the emblematic Che tattoo on his right arm during a trip where he met Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. In Stavropol, in southern Russia, protesters denouncing cash payments of welfare concessions took to the central square with Che flags. In San Francisco, City Lights Books, the legendary home of beat literature, treats visitors to a section devoted to Latin America in which half the shelves are taken up by Che books. José Luis Montoya, a Mexican police officer who battles drug crime in Mexicali, wears a Che sweatband because it makes him feel stronger. At the Dheisheh refugee camp on the West Bank, Che posters adorn a wall that pays tribute to the Intifada. A Sunday magazine devoted to social life in Sydney, Australia, lists the three dream guests at a dinner party: Alvar Aalto, Richard Branson, and Che Guevara. Leung Kwok-hung, the rebel elected to Hong Kong's Legislative Council, defies Beijing by wearing a Che T-shirt. In Brazil, Frei Betto, President Lula da Silva's adviser in charge of the high-profile "Zero Hunger" program, says that "we should have paid less attention to Trotsky and much more to Che Guevara." And most famously, at this year's Academy Awards ceremony Carlos Santana and Antonio Banderas performed the theme song from *The Motorcycle Diaries,* and Santana showed up wearing a Che T-shirt and a crucifix. The manifestations of the new cult of Che are everywhere. Once again the myth is firing up people whose causes for the most part represent the exact opposite of what Guevara was.

NO MAN IS WITHOUT SOME REdeeming qualities. In the case of Che Guevara, those qualities may help us to measure the gulf that separates reality from myth. His honesty (well, partial honesty) meant that he left written testimony of his cruelties, including the really ugly, though not the ugliest, stuff. His courage—what Castro described as "his way, in every difficult and dangerous moment, of doing the most difficult and dangerous thing"—meant that he did not live to take full responsibility for Cuba's hell. Myth can tell you as much about an era as truth. And so it is that thanks to Che's own testimonials to his thoughts and his deeds, and thanks also to his premature departure, we may know exactly how deluded so many of our contemporaries are about so much.

Guevara might have been enamored of his own death, but he was much more enamored of other people's deaths. In



MARCOCCHI GIULIO/SIPA/NEWSCOM

Carlos Santana at the Oscars

April 1967, speaking from experience, he summed up his homicidal idea of justice in his "Message to the Tricontinental": "hatred as an element of struggle; unbending hatred for the enemy, which pushes a human being beyond his natural limitations, making him into an effective, violent, selective, and cold-blooded killing machine." His earlier writings are also peppered with this rhetorical and ideological violence. Although his former girlfriend Chichina Ferreyra doubts that the original version of the diaries of his motorcycle trip contains the observation that "I feel my nostrils dilate savoring the acrid smell of gunpowder and blood of the enemy," Guevara did share with Granado at that very young age this exclamation: "Revolution without firing a shot? You're crazy." At other times the young bohemian seemed unable to distinguish between the levity of death as a spectacle and the tragedy of a revolution's victims. In a letter to his mother in 1954, written in Guatemala, where he witnessed the overthrow of the revolutionary government of Jacobo Arbenz, he wrote: "It was all a lot of fun, what with the bombs, speeches, and other distractions to break the monotony I was living in."

Guevara's disposition when he traveled with Castro from Mexico to Cuba aboard the *Granma* is captured in a phrase in a letter to his wife that he penned on January 28, 1957, not long after disembarking, which was published in her book *Ernesto: A Memoir of Che Guevara in Sierra Maestra*: "Here in the Cuban jungle, alive and bloodthirsty." This mentality had been reinforced by his conviction that Arbenz had lost power because he had failed to execute his potential enemies. An earlier letter to his former girlfriend Tita Infante had observed that "if there had been some executions, the government would have maintained the capacity to return the blows." It is hardly a surprise that during the armed struggle against Batista, and then after the triumphant entry into Havana, Guevara murdered or oversaw the executions in summary trials of scores of people—proven enemies, suspected enemies, and those who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In January 1957, as his diary from the Sierra Maestra indicates, Guevara shot Eutimio Guerra because he suspected him of passing on information: "I ended the problem with a .32 caliber pistol, in the right side of his brain.... His belongings were now mine." Later he shot Aristidio, a peasant who expressed the desire to leave whenever the rebels moved on. While he wondered whether this particular victim "was really guilty enough to deserve death," he had no qualms about ordering the death of Echevarría, a brother of one of his comrades, because of unspecified crimes: "He had to pay the price." At other times he would simulate executions without carrying them out, as a method of psychological torture.

Luis Guardia and Pedro Corzo, two researchers in Florida who are working on a documentary about Guevara, have

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obtained the testimony of Jaime Costa Vázquez, a former commander in the revolutionary army known as "El Catalán," who maintains that many of the executions attributed to Ramiro Valdés, a future interior minister of Cuba, were Guevara's direct responsibility, because Valdés was under his orders in the mountains. "If in doubt, kill him" were Che's instructions. On the eve of victory, according to Costa, Che ordered the execution of a couple dozen people in Santa Clara, in central Cuba, where his column had gone as part of a final assault on the island. Some of them were shot in a hotel, as Marcelo Fernández-Zayas, another former revolutionary who later became a journalist, has written—adding that among those executed, known as *casquitos*, were peasants who had joined the army simply to escape unemployment.

BUT THE "COLD-BLOODED KILLing machine" did not show the full extent of his rigor until, immediately after the collapse of the Batista regime, Castro put him in charge of La Cabaña prison. (Castro had a clinically good eye for picking the right person to guard the revolution against infection.) San Carlos de La Cabaña was a stone fortress used to defend Havana against English pirates in the eighteenth century; later it became a military barracks. In a manner chillingly reminiscent of Lavrenti Beria, Guevara presided during the first half of 1959 over one of the darkest periods of the revolution. José Vilasuso, a lawyer and a professor at Universidad Interamericana de Bayamón in Puerto Rico, who belonged to the body in charge of the summary judicial process at La Cabaña, told me recently that

> Che was in charge of the Comisión Depuradora. The process followed the law of the Sierra: there was a military court and Che's guidelines to us were that we should act with conviction, meaning that they were all murderers and the revolutionary way to proceed was to be implacable. My direct superior was Miguel Duque Estrada. My duty was to legalize the files before they were sent on to the Ministry. Executions took place from Monday to Friday, in the middle of the night, just after the sentence was given and automatically confirmed by the appellate body. On the most gruesome night I remember, seven men were executed.

Javier Arzuaga, the Basque chaplain who gave comfort to those sentenced to die and personally witnessed dozens of executions, spoke to me recently from his home in Puerto Rico. A former Catholic priest, now seventy-five, who describes himself as "closer to Leonardo Boff and Liberation Theology than to the former Cardinal Ratzinger," he recalls that

> there were about eight hundred prisoners in a space fit for no more than three hundred: former Batista military and police personnel, some journalists, a few businessmen and merchants. The revolutionary tribunal was made of militiamen. Che Guevara presided over the appellate court. He never overturned a sentence. I would visit those on death row at the *galera de la muerte*. A rumor went around that I hypnotized prisoners because many remained calm, so Che ordered that I be present at the executions. After I left in May, they executed many more, but I personally witnessed fifty-five executions. There was an American, Herman Marks, apparently a former convict. We called him "the butcher" because he enjoyed giving the order to shoot. I pleaded many times with Che on behalf of prisoners. I remember especially the case of Ariel Lima, a young boy. Che did not budge. Nor did Fidel, whom I visited. I became so traumatized that at the end of May 1959 I was ordered to leave the parish of Casa Blanca, where La Cabaña was located and where I had held Mass for three years. I went to Mexico for treatment. The day I left, Che told me we had both tried to bring one another to each other's side and had failed. His last words were: "When we take our masks off, we will be enemies."

How many people were killed at La Cabaña? Pedro Corzo offers a figure of some two hundred, similar to that given by Armando Lago, a retired economics professor who has compiled a list of 179 names as part of an eight-year study on executions in Cuba. Vilasuso told me that four hundred people were executed between January and the end of June in 1959 (at which point Che ceased to be in charge of La Cabaña). Secret cables sent by the American Embassy in Havana to the State Department in Washington spoke of "over 500." According to Jorge

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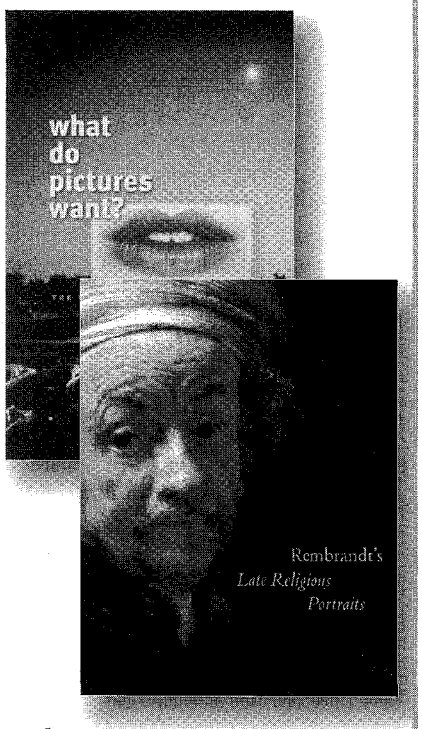

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Castañeda, one of Guevara's biographers, a Basque Catholic sympathetic to the revolution, the late Father Iñaki de Aspiazú, spoke of seven hundred victims. Félix Rodríguez, a CIA agent who was part of the team in charge of the hunt for Guevara in Bolivia, told me that he confronted Che after his capture about "the two thousand or so" executions for which he was responsible during his lifetime. "He said they were all CIA agents and did not address the figure," Rodríguez recalls. The higher figures may include executions that took place in the months after Che ceased to be in charge of the prison.

Which brings us back to Carlos Santana and his chic Che gear. In an open letter published in *El Nuevo Herald* on March 31 of this year, the great jazz musician Paquito D'Rivera castigated Santana for his costume at the Oscars, and added: "One of those Cubans [at La Cabaña] was my cousin Bebo, who was imprisoned there precisely for being a Christian. He recounts to me with infinite bitterness how he could hear from his cell in the early hours of dawn the executions, without trial or process of law, of the many who died shouting, 'Long live Christ the King!' "

CHE'S LUST FOR POWER HAD other ways of expressing itself besides murder. The contradiction between his passion for travel—a protest of sorts against the of the nation-state—and his impulse to become himself an enslaving state over others is poignant. In writing about Pedro Valdivia, the conquistador of Chile, Guevara reflected: "He belonged to that special class of men the species produces every so often, in whom a craving for limitless power is so extreme that any suffering to achieve it seems natural." He might have been describing himself. At every stage of his adult life, his megalomania manifested itself in the predatory urge to take over other people's lives and property, and to abolish their free will.

In 1958, after taking the city of Sancti Spiritus, Guevara unsuccessfully tried to impose a kind of *sharia*, regulating relations between men and women, the use of alcohol, and informal gambling—a puritanism that did not exactly characterize his own way of life. He also ordered his men to rob banks, a decision that he justified in a letter to Enrique Oltuski, a subordinate, in November of that year: "The struggling masses agree to robbing banks because none of them has a penny in them." This idea of revolution as a license to re-allocate property as he saw fit led the Marxist Puritan to take over the mansion of an emigrant after the triumph of the revolution.

The urge to dispossess others of their property and to claim ownership of others' territory was central to Guevara's politics of raw power. In his memoirs, the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser records that Guevara asked him how many people had left his country because of land reform. When Nasser replied that no one had left, Che countered in anger that the way to measure the depth of change is by the number of people "who feel there is no place for them in the new society." This predatory instinct reached a pinnacle in 1965, when he started talking, God-like, about the "New Man" that he and his revolution would create.

Che's obsession with collectivist control led him to collaborate on the formation of the security apparatus that was set up to subjugate six and a half million Cubans. In early 1959, a series of secret meetings took place in Tarará, near Havana, at the mansion to which Che temporarily withdrew to recover from an illness. That is where the top leaders, including Castro, designed the Cuban police state. Ramiro Valdés, Che's subordinate during the guerrilla war, was put in charge of G-2, a body modeled on the Cheka. Angel Ciutah, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War sent by the Soviets who had been very close to Ramón Mercader, Trotsky's assassin, and later befriended Che, played a key role in organizing the system, together with Luis Alberto Lavandeira, who had served the boss at La Cabaña. Guevara himself took charge of G-6, the body tasked with the ideological indoctrination of the armed forces. The U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 became the perfect occasion to consolidate the new police state, with the rounding up of tens of thousands of Cubans and a new series of executions. As Guevara himself told the Soviet ambassador Sergei Kudriavtsev, counterrevolutionaries were never "to raise their head again."

"COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY" is the term that was applied to anyone who departed from dogma. It was the communist synonym for "heretic." Concentration camps were one form in which dogmatic power was employed to suppress dissent. History attributes to the Spanish general Valeriano Weyler, the captain-general of Cuba at the end of the nineteenth century, the first use of the word "concentration" to describe the policy of surrounding masses of potential opponents—in his case, supporters of the Cuban independence movement—with barbed wire and fences. How fitting that Cuba's revolutionaries more than half a century later were to take up this indigenous tradition. In the beginning, the revolution mobilized volunteers to build schools and to work in ports, plantations, and factories—all exquisite photo-ops for Che the stevedore, Che the cane-cutter, Che the clothmaker. It was not long before volunteer work became a little less voluntary: the first forced labor camp, Guanahacabibes, was set up in western Cuba at the end of 1960. This is how Che explained the function performed by this method of confinement: "[We] only send to Guanahacabibes those doubtful cases where we are not sure people should go to jail ... people who have committed crimes against revolutionary morals, to a lesser or greater degree.... It is hard labor, not brute labor, rather the working conditions there are hard."

This camp was the precursor to the eventual systematic confinement, starting in 1965 in the province of Camagüey, of dissidents, homosexuals, AIDS victims, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Afro-Cuban priests, and other such scum, under the banner of Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción, or Military Units to Help Production. Herded into buses and trucks, the "unfit" would be transported at gunpoint into concentration camps organized on the Guanahacabibes mold. Some would never return; others would be raped, beaten, or mutilated; and most would be traumatized for life, as Néstor Almendros's wrenching documentary *Improper Conduct* showed the world a couple of decades ago.

SO *TIME* MAGAZINE MAY HAVE been less than accurate in August 1960 when it described the revolution's division of labor with a cover story featuring Che Guevara as the "brain" and Fidel Castro as the "heart" and Raúl Castro as the "fist." But the perception reflected Guevara's crucial role in turning Cuba into a bastion of totalitarianism. Che was a somewhat unlikely

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candidate for ideological purity, given his bohemian spirit, but during the years of training in Mexico and in the ensuing period of armed struggle in Cuba he emerged as the communist ideologue infatuated with the Soviet Union, much to the discomfort of Castro and others who were essentially opportunists using whatever means were necessary to gain power. When the would-be revolutionaries were arrested in Mexico in 1956, Guevara was the only one who admitted that he was a communist and was studying Russian. (He spoke openly about his relationship with Nikolai Leonov from the Soviet Embassy.) During the armed struggle in Cuba, he forged a strong alliance with the Popular Socialist Party (the island's Communist Party) and with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, a key player in the conversion of Castro's regime to communism.

This fanatical disposition made Che into a linchpin of the "Sovietization" of the revolution that had repeatedly boasted about its independent character. Very soon after the *barbudos* came to power, Guevara took part in negotiations with Anastas Mikoyan, the Soviet deputy prime minister, who visited Cuba. He was entrusted with the mission of furthering Soviet-Cuban negotiations during a visit to Moscow in late 1960. (It was part of a long trip in which Kim Il Sung's North Korea was the country that impressed him "the most.") Guevara's second trip to Russia, in August 1962, was even more significant, because it sealed the deal to turn Cuba into a Soviet nuclear beachhead. He met Khrushchev in Yalta to finalize details on an operation that had already begun and involved the introduction of forty-two Soviet missiles, half of which were armed with nuclear warheads, as well as launchers and some forty-two thousand soldiers. After pressing his Soviet allies on the danger that the United States might find out what was happening, Guevara obtained assurances that the Soviet navy would intervene—in other words, that Moscow was ready to go to war.

According to Philippe Gavi's biography of Guevara, the revolutionary had bragged that "this country is willing to risk everything in an atomic war of unimaginable destructiveness to defend a principle." Just after the Cuban missile crisis ended—with Khrushchev reneging on the promise made in Yalta and negotiating a deal with the United States behind Castro's back that included the removal of American missiles from Turkey—Guevara told a British communist daily: "If the rockets had remained, we would have used them all and directed them against the very heart of the United States, including New York, in our defense against aggression." And a couple of years later, at the United Nations, he was true to form: "As Marxists we have maintained that peaceful coexistence among nations does not include coexistence between exploiters and the exploited."

Guevara distanced himself from the Soviet Union in the last years of his life. He did so for the wrong reasons, blaming Moscow for being too soft ideologically and diplomatically, for making too many concessions—unlike Maoist China, which he came to see as a haven of orthodoxy. In October 1964, a memo written by Oleg Daroussenkov, a Soviet official close to him, quotes Guevara as saying: "We asked the Czechoslovaks for arms; they turned us down. Then we asked the Chinese; they said yes in a few days, and did not even charge us, stating that one does not sell arms to a friend." In fact, Guevara resented the fact that Moscow was asking other members of the communist bloc, including Cuba, for something in return for its colossal aid and political support. His final attack on Moscow came in Algiers, in February 1965, at an international conference, where he accused the Soviets of adopting the "law of value," that is, capitalism. His break with the Soviets, in sum, was not a cry for independence. It was an Enver Hoxha–like howl for the total subordination of reality to blind ideological orthodoxy.

THE GREAT REVOLUTIONARY had a chance to put into practice his economic vision—his idea of social justice—as head of the National Bank of Cuba and of the Department of Industry of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform at the end of 1959, and, starting in early 1961, as minister of industry. The period in which Guevara was in charge of most of the Cuban economy saw the near-collapse of sugar production, the failure of industrialization, and the introduction of rationing—all this in what had been one of Latin America's four most economically successful countries since before the Batista dictatorship.

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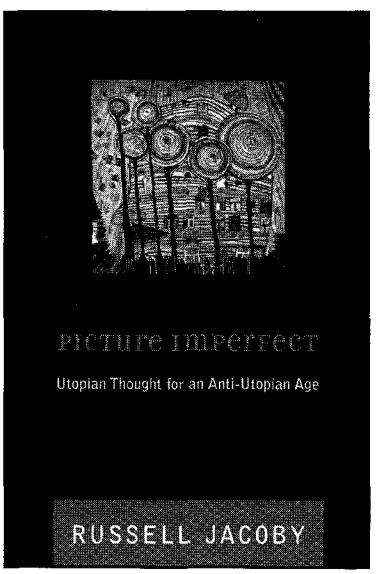

Picture Imperfect
Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age
Russell Jacoby

"Erudite polemic, spirited and consistently engaging."
—James Miller, author of The Passion of Michel Foucault

Noted social critic and historian Russell Jacoby challenges conventional wisdom by resuscitating and defending the iconoclastic utopian spirit. Not only has utopianism been unfairly characterized, he argues, but a return to utopianism is vital for reviving society's dormant political imagination.

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His stint as head of the National Bank, during which he printed bills signed "Che," has been summarized by his deputy, Ernesto Betancourt: "[He] was ignorant of the most elementary economic principles." Guevara's powers of perception regarding the world economy were famously expressed in 1961, at a hemispheric conference in Uruguay, where he predicted a 10 percent rate of growth for Cuba "without the slightest fear," and, by 1980, a per capita income greater than that of "the U.S. today." In fact, by 1997, the thirtieth anniversary of his death, Cubans were dieting on a ration of five pounds of rice and one pound of beans per month; four ounces of meat twice a year; four ounces of soybean paste per week; and four eggs per month.

Land reform took land away from the rich, but gave it to the bureaucrats, not to the peasants. (The decree was written in Che's house.) In the name of diversification, the cultivated area was reduced and manpower distracted toward other activities. The result was that between 1961 and 1963, the harvest was down by half, to a mere 3.8 million metric tons. Was this sacrifice justified by progress in Cuban industrialization? Unfortunately, Cuba had no raw materials for heavy industry, and, as a consequence of the revolutionary redistribution, it had no hard currency with which to buy them—or even basic goods. By 1961, Guevara was having to give embarrassing explanations to the workers at the office: "Our technical comrades at the companies have made a toothpaste ... which is as good as the previous one; it cleans just the same, though after a while it turns to stone." By 1963, all hopes of industrializing Cuba were abandoned, and the revolution accepted its role as a colonial provider of sugar to the Soviet bloc in exchange for oil to cover its needs and to re-sell to other countries. For the next three decades, Cuba would survive on a Soviet subsidy of somewhere between $65 billion and $100 billion.

HAVING FAILED AS A HERO OF social justice, does Guevara deserve a place in the history books as a genius of guerrilla warfare? His greatest military achievement in the fight against Batista—taking the city of Santa Clara after ambushing a train with heavy reinforcements—is seriously disputed. Numerous testimonies indicate that the commander of the train surrendered in advance, perhaps after taking bribes. (Gutiérrez Menoyo, who led a different guerrilla group in that area, is among those who have decried Cuba's official account of Guevara's victory.) Immediately after the triumph of the revolution, Guevara organized guerrilla armies in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Haiti—all of which were crushed. In 1964, he sent the Argentine revolutionary Jorge Ricardo Masetti to his death by persuading him to mount an attack on his native country from Bolivia, just after representative democracy had been restored to Argentina.

Particularly disastrous was the Congo expedition in 1965. Guevara sided with two rebels—Pierre Mulele in the west and Laurent Kabila in the east—against the ugly Congolese government, which was sustained by the United States as well as by South African and exiled Cuban mercenaries. Mulele had taken over Stanleyville earlier before being driven back. During his reign of terror, as V. S. Naipaul has written, he murdered all the people who could read and all those who wore a tie. As for Guevara's other ally, Laurent Kabila, he was merely lazy and corrupt at the time; but the world would find out in the 1990s that he, too, was a killing machine. In any event, Guevara spent most of 1965 helping the rebels in the east before fleeing the country ignominiously. Soon afterward, Mobutu came to power and installed a decades-long tyranny. (In Latin American countries too, from Argentina to Peru, Che-inspired revolutions had the practical result of reinforcing brutal militarism for many years.)

In Bolivia, Che was defeated again, and for the last time. He misread the local situation. There had been an agrarian reform years before; the government had respected many of the peasant communities' institutions; and the army was close to the United States despite its nationalism. "The peasant masses don't help us at all" was Guevara's melancholy conclusion in his Bolivian diary. Even worse, Mario Monje, the local communist leader, who had no stomach for guerrilla warfare after having been humiliated at the elections, led Guevara to a vulnerable location in the southeast of the country. The circumstances of Che's capture at Yuro ravine, soon after meeting the French intellectual Régis Debray and the Argentine painter Ciro Bustos, both of whom were arrested as they left the camp, was, like most of the Bolivian expedition, an amateur's affair.

Guevara was certainly bold and courageous, and quick at organizing life on a military basis in the territories under his control, but he was no General Giap. His book *Guerrilla Warfare* teaches that popular forces can beat an army, that it is not necessary to wait for the right conditions because an insurrectional *foco* (or small group of revolutionaries) can bring them about, and that the fight must primarily take place in the countryside. (In his prescription for guerrilla warfare, he also reserves for women the roles of cooks and nurses.) However, Batista's army was not an army, but a corrupt bunch of thugs with no motivation and not much organization; and guerrilla *focos,* with the exception of Nicaragua, all ended up in ashes for the *foquistas*; and Latin America has turned 70 percent urban in these last four decades. In this regard, too, Che Guevara was a callous fool.

IN THE LAST FEW DECADES OF THE nineteenth century, Argentina had the second-highest growth rate in the world. By the 1890s, the real income of Argentine workers was greater than that of Swiss, German, and French workers. By 1928, that country had the twelfth-highest per capita GDP in the world. That achievement, which later generations would ruin, was in large measure due to Juan Bautista Alberdi.

Like Guevara, Alberdi liked to travel: he walked through the pampas and deserts from north to south at the age of fourteen, all the way to Buenos Aires. Like Guevara, Alberdi opposed a tyrant, Juan Manuel Rosas. Like Guevara, Alberdi got a chance to influence a revolutionary leader in power—Justo José de Urquiza, who toppled Rosas in 1852. And like Guevara, Alberdi represented the new government on world tours, and died abroad. But unlike the old and new darling of the left, Alberdi never killed a fly. His book, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización de la República Argentina,* was the foundation of the Constitution of 1853 that limited government, opened trade, encouraged immigration, and secured property rights, thereby inaugurating a seventy-year period of astonishing prosperity. He did not meddle in the affairs of other nations, opposing his country's war against Paraguay. His likeness does not adorn Mike Tyson's abdomen. ■

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Paula Fredriksen
Textual Healing

AUGUSTINE: A NEW BIOGRAPHY
By James J. O'Donnell
(HarperCollins, 396 pp., $26.95)

IT IS HARD TO LOVE AUGUSTINE. He stands as the source of some of the most baleful traditions of thought in Western culture. All humans, he held, are born indelibly marked, indelibly marred, by original sin. Human desire, especially sexual desire, is a premier sign and effect of Adam's fall. Unbaptized babies go to hell. Salvation is a question not of human effort, but of divine predestination. The church, to propound spiritual truth and to protect it, should avail itself of the coercive power of the state. These are all Augustinian teachings.

And yet it is hard not to love Augustine. He states his questions and his convictions about the human condition with such ardor that the flames of his ideas leap across the chasm of sixteen centuries from his lifetime into our own. Against the best philosophy of his day, he insisted that the human being was more than a mind sojourning in an inconvenient body. Flesh, he urged, truly is the native home of spirit: body and soul belong together, and together make up the whole person. Memory, he asserted, defines and constitutes self. And love, as he passionately and relentlessly wrote, is the hinge of the soul, the motor of the will. What moves us is not what we know, but what we want. We are what we love.

How can someone born so long ago seem so easily our contemporary? The answer lies in part with the effects of Augustine's work: we are heirs to the culture that he helped to shape. And in part the answer lies with the enormousness of his written legacy: we feel that we know Augustine because, to a degree unsurpassed by any other ancient figure, we actually can know him. The huge corpus of his formal writings—commentaries, treatises, polemical tracts, speculative theology—comprises some three million words. Not only do we have these words, but thanks to the catalogue of his own writings that he assembled late in life, the *Retractationes* ("Reconsiderations"), we can securely date them. The effect is the intellectual equivalent of a time-lapse photograph. We can literally (and literarily) trace the growth of his thought, the movements of his mind, along the trajectory of his life from the year 386—when, at the age of thirty-two, he decided to embrace lifelong celibacy and be baptized into the church—to the year 430, when he died. To this we can add another two million words from his bulky dossier of sermons and letters. And of course we have also the brilliant and original theological treatise that combined exegesis, epistemology, and theological polemic with haunting autobiographical meditation: the thirteen books of his *Confessions*.

This last work, argues James J. O'Donnell, represents the fundamental reason for Augustine's continuing cultural presence. Its title, its seemingly intimate narration of a personal past, its resolute focus on spirituality and continence and thus on their opposite, *concupiscentia carnalis*, the appetites of the flesh: all these can make the *Confessions* seem like, well, a candid confession. But Augustine ends the ostensibly autobiographical part of his story in Book Nine. Fully 40 percent of its eighty thousand words still remain: rich discussions of memory, time, divine revelation. The *Confessions* may present Augustine's life story, but he sets that story within the infinitely larger and intensely philosophical context of eternity. Its incandescent final books retrospectively alter any simple reading of the earlier narrative ones.

Augustine did not "write" his *Confessions*, pouring his thoughts onto the page during some dark night of the soul. He performed them, declaiming his gorgeous prose always in the presence of at least one or two other people, the skilled *notarii* who took dictation. The product of his performance conforms not to modern canons of candor, but to ancient standards of rhetorical presentation. The *Confessions* is a work of brilliant

Paula Fredriksen's new book, AUGUSTINE AND THE JEWS, *will be published next year by Doubleday.*

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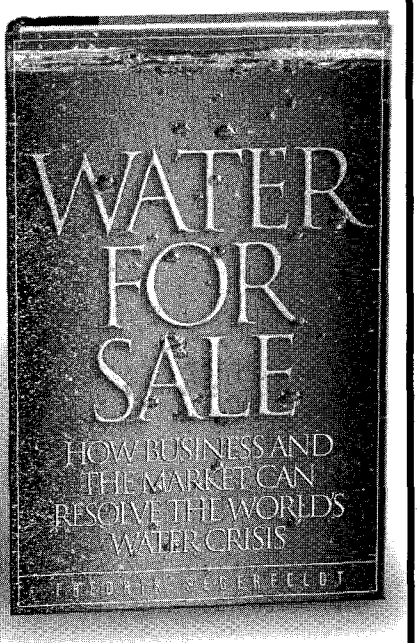

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artifice and power, a virtuoso act of self-invention and justification. It conceals more than it reveals.

No living scholar knows the *Confessions* better than O'Donnell does. In 1992, he published a definitive three-volume study of the work, an edition of the Latin text together with a wide-flung commentary. Now he has set his hand to writing a life history of its author. O'Donnell begins his biography with Augustine's great classic; but, knowing his subject as he does, he skillfully evades the traps that Augustine set in the *Confessions* for his later readers. And while treating the full sweep of Augustine's life, he refuses to let Augustine control the story. O'Donnell helps us attend to what Augustine did not confess.

What was the story that Augustine told? In Books One and Two of the *Confessions*, we catch glimpses of his childhood in a small town in the Numidian highlands of North Africa, a place (in O'Donnell's deft description) that "felt a little like Western Canada before World War II." Book Three is all bright lights, big city: the gifted kid on a scholarship from a moneyed hometown patron goes to university—to Carthage, "where a cauldron of illicit loves boiled about me." Augustine tore through his first year of student life, frequenting theatrical performances and church services looking for opportunities "to love and to be loved." He shifted his studies from law to philosophy. He took a common-law wife, who bore his son. And shortly before he turned nineteen, he joined an outlawed Christian group, a New Age sect par excellence: the Manichees.

Why? The forty-three-year-old bishop presents his youthful allegiance as a passing mistake caused by a toxic combination of intellectual arrogance, philosophical immaturity (he hadn't yet read the Platonists), and fundamental error (truth is available, after all, only within the true church). The beauty and the power of Cicero's prose, he claims, turned him away from the familiar Christian scriptures, which he could read only in clumsy Latin translation. (Roman gentlemen in Augustine's culture were in principle bilingual, at home also in Greek. His intelligence could never fully compensate for the second-rate quality of his early education and of his up-country origins.) Raised in a Christian household, Augustine knew that he wanted to remain Christian; newly awakened intellectually, he also knew that he could find few satisfactions in the *superstitio* of his mother's church.

The Manichees offered a perfect solution. They were Christian. They made the case for their theology by appealing to reason, not to authority. Committed ascetics whose spiritual elite were consecrated to a lifetime of sexual renunciation, vegetarianism, and poverty, they built their principles on the foundation of the Apostle Paul, augmented by esoteric scriptures of their own. And the fact that they were a persecuted minority—since the late third century, emperors both pagan and Christian had prohibited the sect—contributed to their cachet.

Unlike their orthodox competition, moreover, the Manichees had the virtue of consistency. If flesh was a source of evil, they held, if extreme austerity was evidence of holiness, then Christian scripture should reflect this. The Manichees accordingly repudiated the Old Testament: worse than "too Jewish," it was simply, irredeemably incoherent, both morally and theologically. Its god clearly had bodily shape, and hair, and nails. (After all, he had made humans in his own image.) He had framed this flawed material universe and then, against common experience, pronounced it "good." He enjoined carnal intercourse ("Be fruitful and multiply"). He demanded animal sacrifices when he was not enjoining humans to butcher each other. Such a god could have nothing to do with Christ.

And Paul the Apostle, the Manichees held, had plainly said as much. Who but Paul had so clearly seen and explained the absolute distinction between good and evil, spirit and flesh, law and gospel, inner man and outer man? Paul and the Gospels pointed the way to understanding the problem of evil. No good god could have created such a turbulent, imperfect world. Instead, two independent and opposed realms, Light and Darkness, good and evil, were locked in cosmic conflict. Man was a miniature instance of this intense battle. His moral failings reflected the strength of the forces of darkness waging war within him—"the law of my members," as Paul had written, "at war with the law of my mind."

Split the New Testament off from the Old, the Manichees urged; amplify and enrich Christian teachings with Mani's own revelations. Forget trying to see anything good in marriage when sexuality and procreation were so clearly a part of the problem, not a part of the solution. And embrace the textual consequences of clear thinking: if in the name of the Gospel Christians have dropped circumcision, Sabbath observance, food taboos, and all the myriad fleshly things that the Jewish god demanded, why on earth should they retain the carnal Jewish book?

The Manichees commanded Augustine's loyalty from his early years in Carthage until he was almost thirty. Throughout Books Three and Four of the *Confessions*, the older man belittles the younger man's attachment to their message. He claims that even at the time he found much of Manichaean theology, cosmology, and scriptural interpretation unpersuasive. But in Book Five we find him lingering with them still, not only in Carthage but also, later, in Rome.

Brighter lights, bigger cities: chasing after professional advancement (and pursued by his family's ambitions for him), Augustine moved on, first to Rome to look for a better job, then to Milan to take up the municipal chair of rhetoric that his Manichaean connections had helped him to secure. Once in his new position, he found himself in a city without his familiar support structure: Milan had no Manichaean community. His attachment cooled. Besides, in Milan the best and the brightest—and the most socially established—were Christians of a less exotic stripe. Ardently ambitious, uncomfortably aware of his African accent, unexpectedly unmoored, Augustine drifted.

Milan was a northern capital of the late Empire, abuzz with the wealth, the energy, and the talent that concentrations of political and military power often gather. In the mid-380s, it was also a cultural powerhouse, at the height of a renascence of Platonic studies. The erudite sponsored salons and reading groups dedicated to the study of Neoplatonic philosophy. Ambrose, the city's aristocratic bishop, borrowed from these late pagan works, as well as from philosophically sophisticated Greek patristic writings, to enrich his own sermons. Seeking connections, social advancement, and models of effective rhetoric, Augustine floated between the reading groups and the church. He thus received—in translation, the only way he could receive it—a double dose of late Platonism: the pagan

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stream via the salons, the Christianized stream via Ambrose.

Books Six and Seven of the *Confessions* chart the effects of his sudden immersion in this cosmopolitan culture. Through Ambrose, Augustine learned to think about the Old Testament allegorically. Biblical passages of seemingly intractable carnality, such as God's making man in his image, now yielded shining new truths. "Image" referred not to flesh but to mind, of which the processes, like the divinity they reflected, were utterly immaterial. Scripture's humble style embraced the uneducated many, while its obscurities enticed the interpretive skills of the learned few. Read in the bright light of Ambrosian allegory, the old Jewish texts revealed Christ and his church. The Manichees had it all wrong: the Old Testament, understood spiritually, really was a Christian book.

Pagan metaphysics, meanwhile, dissolved the seeming reasonableness of dualism as an explanation for the problem of evil. For the Manichees, evil had been a cosmic force, an entity, an active power pitted against good. But late Platonists held that evil did not exist, in the same way that darkness or silence does not exist. Darkness is the absence of light; silence, the absence of sound. Thus evil is not a thing, but the absence of a thing—namely, of good. Accordingly, sin occurred not because the individual was overwhelmed by the incursion of a superior evil force, but because of a poor choice of his will. And if aspects of the universe seemed corrupt, this very corruption measured its essential goodness, since only what was good to start with could become less so. At a stroke, for Augustine, the creator god in Scripture was absolved of the problem of evil. Indeed, to think him responsible for evil was not only impious, but also illogical: no one, not even God, can "make" nothing.

Though released from the intellectual knots that had bound him for so long to Manichaeism, Augustine still tarried, unable to make himself join Ambrose's church. Books Six through Eight of the *Confessions* lay out why. Augustine's own perfectionism (aggravated, perhaps, by his social insecurity) paralyzed him. In the late fourth century, when even most clergy were married, the church made no requirement of celibacy. But philosophy did. For the social and intellectual elites among both Christians and pagans, sexual celibacy was *forte à la mode*. In Milan, Augustine moved on the edges of such circles. Whether Christian or pagan, the man truly dedicated to the life of the mind would forswear the entanglements of domestic sexuality.

EVER THE ALPHA, AUGUSTINE recoiled from what he could only consider second-class status—that is, baptism as a married layman. Besides his natural competitiveness, his prior experience as a married (and thus second-class) Manichee would have stiffened what resolve he had. Meanwhile he worked all fronts. His common-law wife, an impediment to his social ascent, was sent back to Africa. He contracted an advantageous marriage to a Milanese aristocrat, though he was forced to wait two years until the girl came of age. (She was twelve at the time.) Finally, as an interim arrangement, he took a mistress. This seemingly unremarkable development in fact mortified him deeply, because it publicly gave the lie to his philosophical pretensions. The

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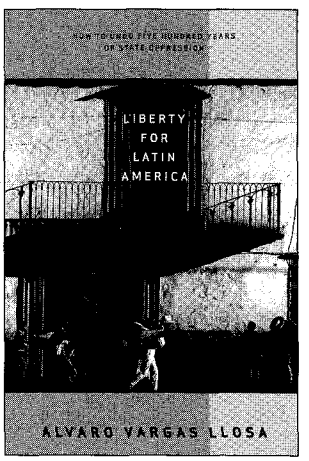

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only reason to take a mistress (as everyone knew) was for sex—an activity that the best and the brightest eschewed.

And so Augustine foundered. In the elaborately written Book Eight, he presents a sequence of interlocking conversion stories interspersed with panting portraits of his own indecision, his divided will, the paralyzing paradox of wanting and not wanting the same thing at the same time. *Da mihi castitatem et continentiam sed noli modo*: "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet." Finally, abruptly, the climax (at least for the modern reader) comes. Augustine, irresolute and exhausted, is surprised to hear a child's voice chanting: *Tolle, lege,* "Pick up and read." He snatches up a volume of the Pauline Epistles, and takes as divine counsel the first lines his eye falls on. He lands, happily, on Romans 13:14: "Make no provision for the flesh and its appetites." And then "all the shadows of doubt were dispelled," Augustine continues. His way clear, his resolve firm, he commits to the celibate life.

Ancient readers, and Augustine himself, would probably see the autobiographical climax of his story in Book Nine, when he is finally baptized. But thereafter the scope of the *Confessions* changes. Book Ten shifts abruptly from Augustine's past (the autobiography ends in Italy in the year 387) to his present (circa 397, when the bishop of Hippo meditates on how humans know what they think they know). Memory, time, eternity: the *Confessions* seems to end at a completely different place from where it began, with a life story. And as the life story disappears, so, it seems, does the plot.

But what emerges with the soaring speculations of these difficult final books is the question that had driven Augustine's tale all along: how can the time-bound, imperfect human being know the timeless, perfect God? God has planted in each soul the desire to know him. But man, as a consequence of Adam's sin and his own, is adrift in time, and knowledge of any and all sorts (of the world, of the self, of God) is always necessarily mediated (by the senses, by images, by signs, by words). In such an infinitely interpretable universe, what certainty can one ever have? Augustine's answer: only such certainty as God imparts (as he had done for Augustine with the counsel to "pick up and read"). Truth without shadows will come only at history's end, when time is swallowed up in "the Sabbath of eternal life." The final paragraph of the *Confessions* closes by evoking the transformation of creation at the resurrection of the dead, somewhere off in an unknowable Beyond. Augustine thus concludes the story of his past with a hope for his future, that he will stand among the community of the redeemed. "That door opening onto eternity," O'Donnell notes, "is the real goal of . . . [Augustine's] narrative of the *Confessions*."

Poet at 40

When have I last doubted the tawdry and the weird
Or the dry ploys that only the gravel blind could love?
The weather-beaten I once called *beauty*, the brunt of worrying
That's never shaken—are these the jitters or a slow burn?
Even the flattered are dogs now. Sure, that ravishing Star of David
Couldn't be more dreary—nor supping with the impish stem-winders and swingers.
That's why I crib this guesswork and shim and detail
A tonnage of mannerism into a hunger for the fusty.
Restrained, birth-marked, cast off, I didn't stake out a beggar's prophecy.
Instead, I hunker and doze with the late impatiens,
And, like a keeper of reveries, I tally the rings of their ripening pallor.

DAVID BIESPIEL

ALL SCHOLARS WRITING BIOGraphies of Augustine avail themselves of the material in the *Confessions*, augmenting its elements and expanding its time frame by appeal to the huge corpus of his other writings. O'Donnell is no exception. Other than by virtue of its recent publication, then, does this biography live up to its subtitle? Is it, in any substantial way, really "new"?

The short answer is an emphatic yes. O'Donnell's strategies of reading, his choice and presentation of topics, are admirably innovative. His broad knowledge of the culture and the politics of late antiquity, together with his intimate command of Augustine's own writings, produces a study of enormous range and depth. The multiple tones shading and shaping his discussion—somber and irreverent, sober and playful, effortlessly erudite and effortlessly vernacular—give the book striking freshness and originality. Sometimes Augustine the brilliant performer and ecclesiastical street fighter overwhelms Augustine the thinker, in O'Donnell's portrait. And O'Donnell's many contemporary references will have the unfortunate effect of quickly dating his valuable book. (Invoking the Grateful Dead in connection with late antique relic cults will not remain as illuminating as he thinks.) Still, he provides us with fresh ways to look at Augustine's commitments, his obsessions, and his blind spots, and to appreciate how all these shaped his life and, eventually, his times.

Consider, for example, the virtuoso act of self-interpretation performed in the *Confessions*. O'Donnell enriches our appreciation for what Augustine did not confess, and enables us to interpret more shrewdly what he did confess, by having us attend to two other contemporary Christian communities: the Manichees and the Donatists. In relating his past, Augustine had suppressed the importance of the first group, and refused even to mention the existence of the second. Together, however, they define the controlling preoccupations of his book.

The Manichees were with Augustine both early and late. He treats them in the *Confessions* as just one more species of error, a prolonged adolescent phase. And through his baroque descriptions of exaggerated youthful passion (he married and became a father, remember, at age eighteen), he artfully linked Manichaeism to a continuing sexual profligacy that real Manichees would surely have rebuked. Moreover, Augustine had been just as serious about his Manichaeism as he would be about his later catholicism. As an *auditor*, a second-tier member of this dualist church, he would have participated daily in the ritual of bringing vegetarian meals to the celibate elite, the Elect. His own marital relationship precluded his ascending to that rank. Renouncing sex in his early thirties would

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be difficult, but possible; at nineteen, clearly, he just could not do it. Thus, while Ambrose might have given him better philosophical reasons for choosing celibacy, the normal seasons of life also played their part. All through his twenties, in sum, from his university days to his first great professional success, Augustine was caught in a situation where he could not succeed, could not be among "the best." But being among the best is what he always craved, no matter what group he belonged to.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE question at the center of Manichaean theology—*Unde malum*? Whence, and why, evil?—remained at the center of all of Augustine's own work. Other Christians of different temperament, free of the force of this question, wondered about him. O'Donnell catches this beautifully. "Manicheism," he writes,

> was the one truly impassioned religious experience of his life. He was the sort of person who has a great love affair when young, sees that it just won't work, breaks it off, then settles down in a far more sober and sensible marriage. What he says and does for the rest of his life will be marked by firm allegiance and commitment to the late-blooming relationship, but the mark of the first never goes away, and some who knew him early will be unable to credit the marriage because they remember the passion.

The Donatists were among those Christians who questioned how much Augustine had really left the Manichees behind. That we have to identify such Christians as Donatists already distorts the historical picture. "Donatism" was, quite simply, the form of Christianity native to North Africa. During the last of the pagan imperial persecutions, in 303, some of North Africa's clergy had complied with the government's orders and handed over Christian holy books to be burned. Other clergy defied the order, and were jailed or even martyred. A new day dawned shortly thereafter: in 312, Constantine decided to favor the church. But by that point North Africa's clergy was riven with dissent, as the stalwart accused the pliant of collaboration. The confessors regarded their compromised brethren as *traditores* and challenged the legitimacy of their sacraments. How could a cleric be a conduit of the Holy Spirit when through his conduct he had sinned against the Spirit? The integrity of the sacraments was at stake. Those baptized by traitorous clergy, said the majority, had to be baptized again.

The confessors called the treasonous clergy "Caecilianists," after the name of one of their number. The Caecilianists returned the favor, and called the confessors "Donatists," after Donatus, one of their bishops. Both sides took advantage of Constantine's new mood and asked him to adjudicate. The emperor convened a committee of overseas bishops to examine the African case. These foreign bishops, disliking the idea of rebaptism and fighting their own fights against local purists, found in favor of the Caecilianists. At a stroke, the Caecilianists became the "catholics," the representatives of a universal (*catholica*) communion, and the confessors became the "Donatists."

Augustine entered the church through Ambrose in Milan. When he returned shortly thereafter to Africa, he identified with the Caecilianist minority. Retreating to his family's up-country estate, Augustine read books, wrote treatises, and lived the life of a philosophical Christian gentleman in retirement. By 391, however, everything had changed. His son Adeodatus died, and with him Augustine's reason for holding on to family land. Then, while visiting the undistinguished coastal town of Hippo, Augustine was wrenched out of his former life and inducted into the priesthood by the town's Caecilianist minority. In this way, public life found him again.

THIS PERIOD FROM 391 UNTIL 396, when Augustine became Hippo's bishop, is the years of Augustine's real conversion. His cosmopolitan catholicism did not impress the locals, though his rhetorical presence did. Striving to acculturate himself, he plunged into a study of biblical texts, especially Genesis and Paul, long familiar from his Manichee days. The trail of half-finished and unsuccessful treatises that litter this period gives the measure of his struggle to fit himself into what had become his life. He does not pull himself together until he works yet again on the issues of free will and grace as he sees them configured in and by Paul.

By 396, he has his answer: people are saved not by their own efforts, nor even by calling on God for help with those efforts, but simply and solely by the inscrutable will of the Divine. God chooses whomever he will, for his own unknowable reasons. He turned the persecutor Saul into the Apostle Paul because he, not Saul, had wanted it; and he has the sovereign power and authority to do whatever he wants with his creatures. Humanity universally requires redemption, because of the sin of Adam; but it universally deserves only damnation, again because of the sin of Adam. Thanks to Adam, all human flesh is rebellious and mortal; but so too is the soul, especially its erotic life. Human love, unaided by grace, is compulsive, uncontrollable, disordered, intrinsically depleting: only the love of God—which can be given only by God—heals and fulfills. If God calls the sinner to redemption, he works by re-orienting the person's love. Only through God's grace does the person come to love what is good, rather than simply what he wants.

The "autobiographical" part of the *Confessions* narratively presents this new theological insight of Augustine's. The idea had implications for society as well as for individuals. For one, it meant that, in this period before the final

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judgment, no one can know who is elected to grace or left to perdition: no one can know the heart of another, and what looks like right action could actually be motivated by self-love, that is, pride. Meanwhile—and here this theology was a blow to the Donatists' self-image—the church itself was, and would remain until the end, a mixed population of sinners and saints. In this life there can never be a church of the pure. Uncertainty and opacity characterize both individual and social life before the final redemption. In the meantime, however, Augustine did know one thing for certain. Outside the church—the *true* church, that is: Augustine's church, the church of Ambrose, the church of the emperor—there could be no salvation.

WHY, THEN, WHEN AUGUSTINE writes the *Confessions*, does he tell his story as he does? Why does he minimize his childhood exposure to the Caecilianist church of his mother? Why does he underplay his faithful attachment to the Manichees? Why does he ignore his own ordination, stopping his narrative in 387? Why does he not mention the Donatists at all? O'Donnell argues that this is because Augustine wished to center his story in Italy, in a purely catholic milieu, far from these African disorders. In this account, he meets "true" Christianity only in Milan, when he meets Ambrose. And it is that "true" Christianity that he, as bishop, carries with him forever more. "Caecilianism" (and, accordingly, "Donatism") disappears in this retelling. There is only the *catholica*.

O'Donnell's description of Augustine's lifelong campaign against the Donatists is chilling, and gripping. With consummate party discipline and political skill, Augustine and the talented cadre of Caecilianist bishops who were his friends brought the full force of imperial authority and power to bear on this extremely local fight. The result of his success was a Christian population so utterly demoralized that within a few centuries it disappeared, embracing the new religious message of Islam.

As he traces the stages of Augustine's Caecilianist putsch—the imprisonments, the simmering threat of legal violence, the ingenious acts of co-option—O'Donnell also presents the unlovely portrait of "triumphant" Christianity. Fourth- and fifth-century emperors—successful generals first of all—remade Christianity in their own image. Bishops came to assume the role and the trappings of civic authority, with the support staff needed for administration. (Without the secretarial assistance entailed by his office, Augustine would have been very hard-pressed to finance his prodigious, and expensive, literary output.) Imperial agents clarified theological disputes by force.

Ever solicitous of imperial favor, late Roman aristocrats hastened to join the emperor's fashionable new cult, and so brought their wealth and prestige into the church. From their ranks came a new generation of educated and socially well-connected clergy (like Ambrose, among others). The old civic cults, formerly bankrolled by this class, wobbled as their funding dwindled; and finally they were banned, the temples shut, the rites outlawed. Contemporary Jews remained Roman citizens, though the idea of "the Jew" served as a favorite target of episcopal invective. The main victims of this ecclesiastical revolution, however, were the Christians themselves. As the ideology of a universal orthodoxy took hold, emperors used it and enforced it. More Christians suffered at the hands of the Roman state after the conversion of Constantine than before. From his own vantage point, Augustine saw the use of such force as tough love, a kind of muscular pastoral care. In the perspective of history, however, he stands as a chief architect of the theology of religious coercion.

O'Donnell brings all these different factors to bear—Augustine's personal past, his theological convictions, his political effectiveness (and ruthlessness), his gnawing social ambitions—in his brilliant review of the Pelagian controversy. With aggressive single-mindedness, Augustine insisted on making Pelagius into his great opponent, though Pelagius resisted the role. As O'Donnell points out, Pelagius resembles no one so much as the younger Augustine, the philosophically attuned catholic optimistically embracing the salvation of the church. That is the Augustine invisible, indeed disowned, in the *Confessions*; but it is an Augustine well attested in those gentlemanly treatises written before the theological revolution of 396. Pelagius had cited these early works in making a case for free will that the older Augustine found offensive. In attacking Pelagius, then, Augustine attacked his own younger self, the one who preceded his re-invention in the *Confessions*.

More poignantly, Pelagius embodied the future that Augustine had lost when he returned to Africa. Genuinely cosmopolitan, at home in the salons of the moneyed aristocrats whom he exhorted to moral excellence, Pelagius was what Augustine never became: a minister to the Italian elite. Augustine could cultivate the attention of these people only from a distance, through polite and carefully constructed letters. How much did resentment and regret fuel Augustine's overheated reaction to Pelagius?

Augustine had not sought out these reminders of the road not taken. His past found him in 410, when a wave of Roman aristocrats and their chaplains, fleeing the Vandal incursion into the old capital, washed up in Carthage. Approaching the apogee of his local efforts against the Donatists, Augustine vigorously engaged these new social and theological contacts, wooing the wealthy (with an embarrassing lack of success) and attacking their clerics. One year later, Italy settled down. "Pelagius sailed away from Africa," O'Donnell remarks. "The aristocratic refugees from Rome sailed away as well; and the Donatists stayed behind. Augustine always wrote as if it were the other way around."

Why? O'Donnell speculates about insecurity and social climbing. If the tensions in Augustine's makeup contributed to his fight with Pelagius, they were exacerbated that much more by Pelagius's younger champion, Julian of Eclanum. Julian was everything that Augustine had never been: well born, well educated, bilingual, effortlessly chaste. A bishop who was the son of a bishop, Julian as a young man contracted a *mariage blanc* with the daughter of yet another bishop in a ceremony celebrated by no less a personage than Paulinus of Nola, a fellow aristocratic

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churchman and family friend. (Augustine knew Paulinus only through correspondence.) Augustine used Julian to stage his last great public battle. It was a battle entirely of his own making, played out on an international stage thanks to the letters and treatises that he lobbed all over the Mediterranean. The struggle secured Augustine's broader reputation, but at a cost. In the course of the conflict, he once again found himself accused of being a closeted Manichee. Worse, the younger man stereotyped Augustine as the African, the provincial, the uncouth outsider. It stung.

Augustine "won," ensuring a papal condemnation of Pelagius and driving Julian from his see. He unscrupulously exercised the political connections in the imperial court that he had cultivated so carefully in campaigning against the Donatists. Still, as O'Donnell points out, Augustine also lost. His grim ideas on predestination were impossible as a pastoral theology. Invoking his authority, later churchmen carefully re-interpreted and reshaped his message, softening its doctrinal impact. The extremist strain that he left behind remained in western Christianity, exploding centuries later with Calvin and with Jansen. But extremes are, by definition, marginal.

O'Donnell ends his book with a chiaroscuro appreciation of the multiple Augustines conjured in his volume—Augustine the politician, Augustine the poet of the divided self, Augustine the theoretician of infant baptism, Augustine the anxious sinner, alone on his deathbed, going to his God. But the one he closes on is the one who made all the others possible: Augustine the writer, whose textual afterlife ensures his continuing cultural presence.

As O'Donnell observes, Augustine wrote as if his life depended on it. Perhaps it did. The five million words that he dictated from the time of his conversion until his death amounts to the equivalent of publishing a modern three-hundred-page print book every year for forty years. (And he "wrote" only at night, after meeting his daytime obligations.) However unelevating some of his motivations, however unfortunate his positions and however damaging his successes, Augustine's astonishing literary legacy remains, a monument to his burning intelligence and to his unquiet heart. O'Donnell's vibrant new study brings this imperfect saint to life, both in his wrenching smallness and in his exhilarating grandeur. *Tolle, lege.* ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

holes ("Nuclear Nonsense," May 23). Abe Fortas was nominated by a lame-duck president in an election year. His filibuster lasted just four days. What's more, minority Republicans didn't filibuster Clinton's judicial nominees in his first two years in office. You criticized the GOP for holding up Clinton nominees in committee, but that was done routinely to George H.W. Bush's nominees, as well. In just four years, more than 50 judges were blocked in committee by the Democratic majority. If there is a valid criticism to be made of the GOP, it is that they did away with many of the parliamentary maneuvers (such as blue slips) that previously allowed the minority to block a vote on a nomination.

PATRICIA KUNZ
Keyport, New Jersey

THE EDITORS MAKE A GOOD POINT about the generally undemocratic judiciary and, therefore, the generally more democratic use of the filibuster against it. But I'm surprised that the editors would not make a distinction between a majority party blocking judicial nominees and a minority party doing so. Clinton's nominees died in committee because they were killed by the democratically elected majority party in the Senate—the GOP.

MATTHEW RAM LEE
Derwood, Maryland

FALSE PROPHET

I TAKE STRONG EXCEPTION TO MASHA Gessen's characterization of the National Bolshevik Party (NBP) as "essentially a pro-democracy group, despite its odd choice of name" ("Show and Tell," May 16). I am certainly no fan of Vladimir Putin, but Eduard Limonov's NBP is hardly pro-democracy. For decades, Limonov has led a movement that champions extreme xenophobia and racism, especially with regard to the other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the United States. He is also well-known for his adulation of Slobodan Milosevic and his decision to join the Serbian army temporarily on a sniper patrol during the Bosnian War. Russia has many problems, but I think that racism is the most insidious and, ultimately, the most devastating to its development. National Bolshevism is not the basis on which to build a Russian democracy, and there are plenty of other victims of Russia's arbitrary justice who would make better martyrs for Gessen than Limonov.

NATHAN HUTSON
Austin, Texas

HOUSE CALL

CLAY RISEN'S ARTICLE REQUIRES several clarifications ("Home Page," May 2 & 9). First, real estate is just about the most competitive business there is. Every consumer can and should negotiate terms for real-estate services. There is no standard commission—never has been and never will be. Second, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) applauds and encourages innovation, new business models, and better ways of serving consumers. That's why we created *Realtor.com*, the most popular real-estate website on the Internet, which the article failed to mention. Third, virtual office websites would not exist without realtors. They rely upon information created by realtors and posted on Multiple Listing Services maintained by realtors. Fourth, it's not true that NAR opposes "an SEC-like body to regulate real estate." We have no position on the question because no one has seriously proposed it before. Risen attributes the idea to unnamed "experts," but he never raised it when he talked to me. I would have been glad to discuss this on the record.

The article also contained the paraphrase: "Cook admits that the opt-out rule was included as a concession to the two industry heavyweights." In discussing the sequence of events that led to the development of NAR's rule on virtual office websites, I emphasized that many months of study, debate, and consensus-building went into the decision. In fact, the decision to proceed with broker opt-out was made by a vote of more than 700 board members after a thorough debate of the merits of the issue. No concessions were made to anyone.

STEPHEN COOK
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NEW YORK DIARIST

Ambassadors at Large

THE BATTLE FOR IRAQI HEARTS and minds continues, and, several weeks ago, the battlefield was a conference room in New York at the Institute of International Education (IIE), which administers the Fulbright grant program. After a 14-year interruption, exchanges with Iraq resumed in early 2004; the second annual class of Iraqi grant recipients had just arrived for an orientation session before scattering across the country for a semester of language study. One of their handlers, a State Department public affairs adviser, explained their mission: to work toward their masters degrees, which are the academic purpose of the two-year program; to explain Iraq to Americans; and to explain the United States to Iraqis upon their return. For many Iraqi Fulbright students, the latter task may prove formidable: It's unclear how well some will be able to explain the United States, even after two years here, or how willing their countrymen will be to listen.

AMONG THE 16 NEW ARRIVALS—ANOTHER 18 would be coming in the following weeks—were a Kurdish moderate Islamist from Irbil interested in American literature and a Shia from Basra who will study propaganda in an effort to limit political influence over Iraqi journalism. But, for now, they were simply trying to get a sense of their new home from a young man and woman from the first Fulbright class, who had been brought in by the organizers to lend perspective after more than a year in the States. "How long does the culture shock last?" one of the new arrivals asked. "Fifteen days?" Hani, one of the two first-years, suggested. (Names have been changed for security reasons.) There was a low sigh of disbelief from the new Fulbrighters, who, having arrived two days earlier, apparently had seen enough to be skeptical. "Fifteen days or fifteen months?" a young woman in a head scarf smirked. "Avoid seeking out other Iraqis and Middle Easterners," Fardous, the other first-year, advised. "But, if you want to speak intimately with someone," another young woman asked, "who do you turn to?" "Most of your friends will be different from you," Fardous cheerfully reassured her, "but that doesn't mean you can't confide in them."

AS FARDOUS ACKNOWLEDGED PRIVATELY later, however, few of her fellow first-years have learned this lesson. Alienated by their perception of American society as excessively permissive, she said, they are essentially waiting out their terms inside cliques of other conservative Arabs and Muslims on campuses across the country. "If I say I went swimming with friends," Fardous told me, "the only thing they want to know is if I was dressed modestly. And, if they see a girl kissing on the street, they don't differentiate between girlfriend and prostitute."

"IN IRAQ, THEY'RE NOT USED TO DIFFERENT people," Hani added. "Even the old professors who got their degrees in England—they're looked at differently. The Fulbrighters who have had a negative experience, they didn't start from scratch. Just because my father says you're a bad guy, that doesn't mean I have to believe the same thing. But they feel, too much, their difference." Fardous mentioned a 2004 Election Day flight from Boston to Washington, D.C., for a group of Iraqi Fulbrighters that was canceled at the last minute. "The guys in the group decided it was because they were Muslim," she said. "But it was because of the weather! They are misunderstanding of American culture. They feel America is too open. So they don't mix."

THERE WAS SOME GIDDINESS IN THE IIE conference room, especially when Hani summed up U.S. gastronomic opportunities: "The food here—you will get used to it." (As for avoiding pork, Fardous told the new Fulbrighters, widespread abstinence by observant Jewish people had made life easy: "If you see 'K,' for 'kosher,' you know you're OK.") For the most part, however, the new arrivals—all but one of whom were unable to reveal their destination to anyone outside their immediate families because of the danger it would pose to their relatives—seemed anxious about adjusting in a country where, apparently, you could call a professor by his first name but not hop on and off a city bus at will. "What about our conservative impulse?" the young man who had wanted to know about culture shock asked, alluding to the Iraqi habit of "keeping your distance" when confronted with unfamiliarity. Fardous explained that Americans were accustomed to foreigners; that some people liked you precisely because you were different; that the United States gave you a chance to discover that you might share more with a foreigner than with a fellow Iraqi.

HANI AND FARDOUS SEEM TO HAVE UNderstood the United States on its own terms, if not necessarily embraced the culture wholesale. "I expected to find a perfect society," Hani told me. "But you meet good guys and bad guys. But they are open to new ideas, and, if they have a counterargument, they will wait until you finish. So open your mind. This man may say something against what you believe, but give him a chance. It won't hurt you." When the Kurd from Irbil asked whether Hani looked forward to returning to Iraq, he said he was eager to: "I have some things to change, starting with my own family," he said, referring to the unequal role of women in it.

ONE WONDERS WHAT KIND OF AMBASsadors the more disenchanted Fulbrighters will make after returning to Baghdad and Basra and what influence their experiences will have on the political culture the occupation is trying to foster. But the fates of Hani and Fardous—the ostensible triumphs—are even more worrying. What kind of change can they hope to make if they, as well as their successors, are unable to reveal their whereabouts to anyone but their parents, and if I have to use pseudonyms in this dispatch? Will they even make it in Iraq? "I do have culture shock," Fardous told me, riffing on the earlier question, "but with Iraqis, not Americans." Will they become the "superfluous men" of twenty-first-century Iraq, their promise stifled by their country's inability to appreciate their message? Forty years from now, will they be "the old professors who got their degrees" in America?

BORIS FISHMAN

Boris Fishman is a writer living in New York City.

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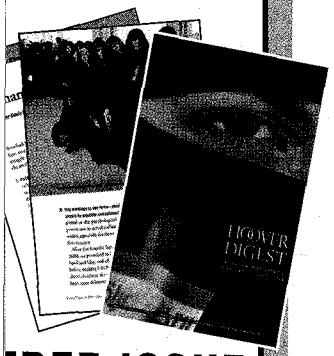

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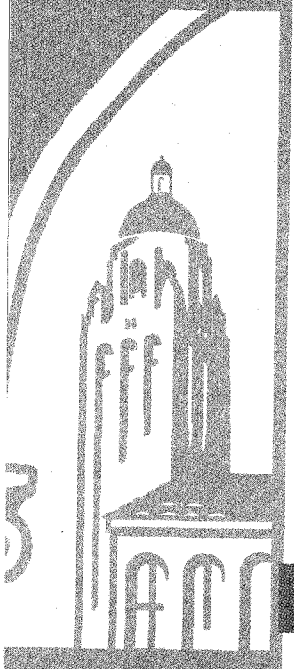

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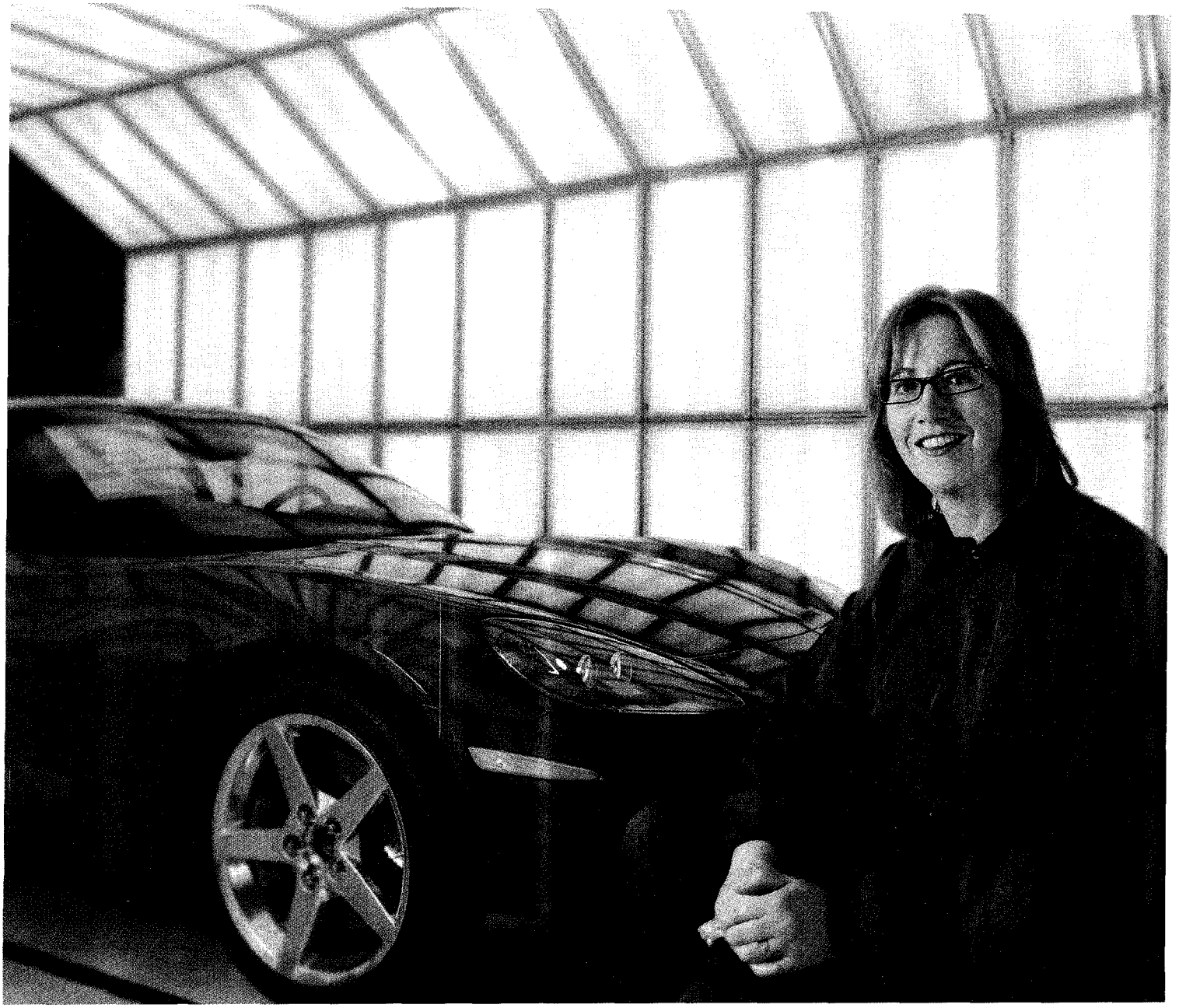

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